



ROBERT BROWNING

From the drawing by D. G. Rossetti in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

ROBERT BROWNING

Poetry & Prose

With Appreciations by
LANDOR, BAGEHOT, SWINBURNE,
HENRY JAMES, SAINTSBURY,
and F. L. LUCAS

With an Introduction and Notes by
SIR HUMPHREY MILFORD

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INTRODUCTION

MORE than fifty years have passed since Browning died: time enough, one would have thought, for his rank among English poets to be determined with reasonable certainty, and for his work to be assessed calmly and judiciously. The days of indiscriminate abuse, of almost equally indiscriminate praise, the painful labours of the Browning Society, are far behind us. Few are now left to let their appreciation of the poems be affected by their remembrance, for good or ill, of the persistent diner-out, the too loud talker, the friendly approachable man of the world. But the half century has not been long enough. Browning is still attacked, almost as if he were alive.

This in itself is a tribute: a dead reputation needs no killing. There Browning is, right in the middle of the nineteenth century, working away at his lyrics, his dramas, his monologues, his novels in verse, till in mere bulk he exceeds almost all other English poets. And he is still much read, much quoted, much reprinted. He bobs up everywhere: in the titles of books and of films, profusely in anthologies (except Bridges's *Spirit of Man*), in other poets' books.

Hostile critics, whether Mr. Santayana or another, can find plenty of stones to throw. Browning is one of the most careless of poets, pouring himself torrentially over anything—syntax, scansion, euphony—that stands in his way. He too often puts up with the second best, from an impatient disinclination for revision. Many of his best lyrics are spoilt by heedless tortuosities, or lazy obscurities of thought or expression. Nor is his thought, when you have unravelled it, often profound.

All this has to be admitted (and much more could be added) and yet I confess that I can read and enjoy every-

thing of Browning's (except the translation of the *Agamemnon*). I was 'entered' in Browning very young, and now, more than forty years on, I return to him with unabated enthusiasm.

Why? Chiefly, perhaps, because he is interested in so many things and—what is more important and much rarer—he conveys his interest to the reader. He is hardly ever dull. Even when, as often in reading *Sordello*, one is not quite sure what it is all about, the landscape through which one travels, the personages met on the way, are attractive. The plays, if notactable, are eminently readable which is more than can be said of most plays written in verse since the beginning of the nineteenth century. And when he really found himself as a poet, in *Bells and Pomegranates*, and the volumes which followed, there is no poet who so successfully keeps the reader's attention. Careless, uncritical, sometimes lacking in taste, he may be yet he shoulders his way triumphantly through all his deficiencies and his wilfulnesses, carrying with him the reader, sometimes protesting, but never—most fatal of all failures—bored. He 'raised colloquialism to lyrical intensity'. 'The very lines seem to fight or fence or ride. They jostle and bustle each other in just the way a crowd moves and forms and re-forms, the words and the meanings packed tight, a story in two or three stanzas, or many characters and stories pushing and edging each other in one poem'¹

What poem of anything like comparable length (more than twenty-one thousand lines of blank verse) is so continuously exciting as *The Ring and the Book*? All through the enormous length Browning never flags. He is as interested in his secondary characters—in the Roman mob, the rival lawyers, the hired assassins, the timid Bishop—as in the main figures—Guido, Caponsacchi, Pompilia, the Pope. It is the

¹ From an essay by P. M. Jones (unpublished)

greatest poem Browning ever wrote and among the greatest English poems

This power of interesting us remains to Browning in many, perhaps most, of his later poems, which are often dismissed even by his admirers as posthumous dronings. The long philosophical poem was not his forte: *La Saisiaz*, *Fifine at the Fair*, seem to me much less successful than *Balaustion's Adventure* or *Aristophanes' Apology* or *Ferishtah's Fancies*, where humanity keeps breaking in. I open *Aristophanes' Apology* almost at random and come across

He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course

or, in *Balaustion's Adventure*,

Whereat the softened eyes
Of the lost maidenhood that lingered still
Straying among the flowers in Sicily,
Sudden was startled back to Hades' throne
By that demand broke through humanity
Into the orb'd omniscience of a God.

A generation ago Browning's admirers sought in him a profound system of theology, a consistent edifice of thought. This is not the modern way of approaching Browning—it is not his thought that we want to get at, it is his insight into character, his flashing of light into dark places of the human mind, above all his delicate and profound handling of love. To Browning human actions and their causes were the passionate and absorbing concern. His world is full of Men and Women and Dramatis Personae and Dramatic Romances. These Childe Rolands and Abt Voglers and Sauls and Cleons—yes, and Hohenstiel-Schwangaus and Ferishtahs too—are exciting, stimulating, moving. Browning puts one

side strongly but hints the other too. He sees the soul of goodness in things evil. Sludge the Medium, Blougram the mitred sceptic, Napoleon III, are all given stronger arguments than they might have thought of in their own defence. As Chesterton says: 'With Browning's knaves we have always the eternal interest, that they are real somewhere, and may at any moment begin to speak poetry. We are speaking to a peevish and garrulous sneak—we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes, and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God, uttering his everlasting soliloquy.'

The story of Browning's courtship, of his slow winning of his 'Ba', in spite of the obstacles interposed partly by her own shyness and invalidism, still more by the existence in the background—and not always safely in the background—of her almost incredible father, can be read in the two volumes of Robert's and Elizabeth's letters. Theirs is the most clearly and profusely documented love affair in English literature—and it culminated in fifteen years of such unclouded happiness as is but rarely attained by any human beings, especially if they are poets. The rather absurd incident of his proposal to Lady Ashburton nine or ten years after his wife's death throws no doubt on his love for Elizabeth, though it may on his sense of humour. 'My heart is buried in Florence' was a poor passport to the heart of a Victorian *grande dame*.

It is as the poet of love that Browning attained and keeps his highest place. He does not speak too loud, he is not overbearing or pugnaciously optimistic. He makes his men and women in relation to each other lovers, with all that that term implies, without a side-glance at their being something else. Through his relationship with Elizabeth,

Browning's whole self flowered; that union fulfilled his poetry as it did his life.

After the completion of *The Ring and the Book*, which was conceived, meditated, and perhaps begun during his wife's lifetime, though not published till after her death, Browning went on writing—there seemed nothing else for him to do, although he always looked after their rather ineffectual son with anxious love and care. Between 1869 and 1888 he published fifteen volumes of verse, in many of which he had little new to say and often said it at too great length and with exaggeration of his earlier manner—poetic shorthand it might be called. Of some of these volumes, though not of *The Ring and the Book*, Calverley's witty parody *The Cock and the Bull* is fair criticism. 'And might, odds-bobs, sir! in judicious hands, Extend from here to Mesopotamy' But few of these volumes are negligible. Browning's interest in the intricacies and queernesses of human character is as keen as ever. The Two Poets of Croisic, Aristophanes (*Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*), Miranda (*Red Cotton Nightcap Country*) are analysed, probed, and exhibited with the same loving care as Lippi, Cleon, and the rest of the 'fifty men and women' of *One Word More*. Nor did women disappear either from Browning's life or from his poetry when Elizabeth died. He liked women's society and they (with a few exceptions) liked his, and Balaustion, Fifine, Clara Mulhausen (*Red Cotton Nightcap Country*), and the ill-used heroine of *The Inn Album* all bear witness to Browning's insight into women's minds and motives.

After the publication of *La Saisiaz* and *The Two Poets of Croisic* in 1878 Browning wrote no more long poems but poured out a succession of shorter poems—Dramatic Idyls, Fancies, Fancies and Facts—the names were different but the poems themselves were the direct

descendants of the Dramatic Romances, Dramatic Lyrics, Men and Women of thirty years before And though the first sprightly running of his poems could hardly be expected from a man of seventy, the vigour and the contagious excitement are still there, and the emotion of some of the lyrics in *Ferishtah's Fancies* and *Asolando* is as deeply felt and expressed as in the most passionate of his earlier love-poems, in fact they are more direct than most of those earlier poems, they throw off all disguises. Here are two such lyrics, neither of which is printed in the Selections that follow

Not with my Soul, Love—bid no Soul like mine
 Lap thee around nor leave the poor Sense room!
 Soul,—travel-worn, toil-weary,—would confine
 Along with Soul, Soul's gains from glow and gloom,
 Captures from soarings high and divings deep
 Spoil-laden Soul, how should such memories sleep?
 Take Sense, too—let me love entire and whole—
 Not with my Soul!

Eyes shall meet eyes and find no eyes between,
 Lips feed on lips, no other lips to fear!
 No past, no future—so thine arms but screen
 The present from surprise! not there, 'tis here—
 Not then, 'tis now —back, memories that intrude!
 Make, Love, the universe our solitude,
 And, over all the rest, oblivion roll—
 Sense quenching Soul!

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee
 All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one
 gem
 In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea
 Breath and bloom, shade and shine,—wonder, wealth, and
 —how far above them—
 Truth, that's brighter than gem,
 Trust, that's purer than pearl,—
 Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe—all were for me
 In the kiss of one girl.

It is more than usually difficult to make a satisfactory selection from Browning. There are few flawless poems, yet very few in which the reader does not come upon memorable lines or stanzas. Moreover, Browning often produces much of his effect by bulk and weight. He unrolls his mind, like his own Bishop Blougram, in a leisurely fashion.

Browning distributed his shorter poems into different categories—*Dramatic Romances*, *Dramatis Personae*, *Men and Women*, and so on—but the distinction was always a fine one and was often disregarded by Browning himself.¹ The chronological order here adopted not only enables us, of course, to relate each poem to Browning's inner and outer life—it has the additional and special advantage of showing Browning's essential identity of thought and feeling at the beginning and end of his life. Between *Pauline* and the Epilogue to *Asolando* stretch nearly sixty years. The youthful Browning invokes Shelley with the cry

Sun-treader, I believe in God and truth
And love

The old Browning ends his last poem before the Epilogue (p. 176) with these lines:

I have faith such end shall be:
From the first, Power was—I knew.
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see
When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

¹ For instance in 1863 he divided the poems originally printed in 1855 as *Men and Women* among the three different titles *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances*, and *Men and Women*.

BROWNING'S LIFE

- 1812. Born in Camberwell (7 May), son of Robert Browning and Sarah Anne Wiedemann
- 1814. Birth of his sister Sarianna (died 22 April 1903).
- 1830-2. At London University.
- 1833 *Pauline* (March)
- 1835 *Paracelsus* (August).
- 1837. *Strafford An Historical Tragedy* (1 May): produced by Macready at Covent Garden on 1 May 1837.
- 1838-9. Travels in Italy.
- 1840. *Sordello* (March)
- 1841. Bells and Pomegranates No I: *Pippa Passes* (April).
- 1842. Bells and Pomegranates No II: *King Victor and King Charles* (12 March)
Bells and Pomegranates No. III: *Dramatic Lyrics* (26 November)
- 1843 Bells and Pomegranates No IV: *The Return of the Druses* a Tragedy in Five Acts (January)
Bells and Pomegranates No. V *A Blot in the Scutcheon* a Tragedy in Three Acts (11 February) Produced by Macready at Drury Lane on 11 February 1843
- 1844. Bells and Pomegranates No VI *Colombe's Birthday*: a Play in Five Acts (20 April) Produced by Phelps at The Haymarket 25 April 1853
- 1845 Bells and Pomegranates No VII. *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (6 November)
First meeting with Elizabeth Barrett (20 May)
- 1846. Bells and Pomegranates No VIII *Luria and A Soul's Tragedy* (13 April)
Marriage with Elizabeth Barrett (12 September). Lives for the next fifteen years mainly in Italy.
- 1849. Birth of only son Robert Barrett (9 March). Death of his mother (18 March). *Poems*, new edition, 2 vols. (Jan.).
- 1850. *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* (April)
- 1855 *Men and Women* Two volumes (November).
- 1861 Death of Mrs Browning (29 June). Browning henceforward lives mainly in London with frequent visits to Brittany, and some (after 1878) to Italy
- 1862. *Selections* (by Forster and Procter) (Dec.).
- 1863. Second collected edition, in three volumes (August, new edition, 1865)
- 1864. *Dramatis Personae* (28 May, reprinted September).

- 1865. *Selections* (by Browning himself).
- 1866. Death of his father (13 June) Henceforward Browning and his sister Sarianna live together
- 1867. Made Hon M A of Oxford (26 June) and Hon Fellow of Balliol (October)
- 1868. Third collected edition, in six volumes (June)
The Ring and the Book, first two volumes (November and December).
- 1869. *The Ring and the Book*, last two volumes (January and February)
- 1871. *Balaustion's Adventure* (August, reprinted March 1872, May 1881)
Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau (December)
- 1872. *Fifine at the Fair* (June) *Selections* [First series. not identical with either that of 1862 or 1865].
- 1873. *Red Cotton Nightcap Country* (May).
- 1875. *Aristophanes' Apology* (April).
The Inn Album (November).
- 1876. *Pacchiarotto* (July)
- 1877. Translation of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (October)
- 1878. *La Saisiaz* (inspired by the death of Browning's friend Anne Egerton-Smith 14 Sept 1877), published in June with *Two Poets of Croisic*
- 1879. *Dramatic Idyls* (May, reprinted July 1882).
- 1880. *Selections* Second Series (May).
Dramatic Idyls Second Series (July).
- 1883. *Jocosera* (April, reprinted May)
- 1884. *Ferishtah's Fancies* (21 November, reprinted December 1884, February 1885)
- 1887. *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* (spring)
- 1888-9. Fourth collected edition, in sixteen volumes, monthly, from May to December, February to August. Vol. XVII (*Asolando*) added, 1894
- 1889. *Asolando* (12 December Sixth edition, 1890)
Death, 12 December Burial in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey
- 1899. *Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* two volumes (February, reprinted March).
- 1912. Centenary edition, in ten volumes, edited by Sir Frederic Kenyon, with ten poems not before collected.
- 1914. New Poems of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, edited by Sir Frederic Kenyon. (Twenty-nine poems and fragments by R. B.)

W. S. LANDOR
To Robert Browning

1845

THERE is delight in singing, though none hear
Beside the singer; and there is delight
In praising, though the praiser sit alone
And see the prais'd far off him, far above.
Shakespeare is not *our* poet, but the world's,
Therefore on him no speech; and brief for thee,
Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale,
No man hath walkt along our roads with step
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue
So varied in discourse. But warmer climes
Give brighter plumage, stronger wing; the breeze
Of Alpine heights thou playest with, borne on
Beyond Sorrento and Amalfi, where
The Siren waits thee, singing song for song.

BAGEHOT

From *The National Review*, Nov. 1864: reprinted in *Literary Studies*

Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; or, Pure, Ornate,
and Grotesque Art in English Poetry. (*Enoch Arden, etc.*
by Alfred Tennyson, D.C.L., Poet Laureate. *Dramatis*
Personae by Robert Browning.)

. . . ORNATE art and pure art have this in common, that
they paint the types of literature in a form as perfect as
they can. Ornate art, indeed, uses undue disguises and
unreal enhancements; it does not confine itself to the best
types; on the contrary, it is its office to make the best of
imperfect types and lame approximations; but ornate art,
as much as pure art, catches its subject in the best light it
can, takes the most developed aspect of it which it can find,

and throws upon it the most congruous colours it can use. But grotesque art does just the contrary. It takes the type, so to say, *in difficulties*. It gives a representation of it in its minimum development, amid the circumstances least favourable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what Nature is striving to be, but with what by some lapse she has happened to become.

This art works by contrast. It enables you to see, it makes you see, the perfect type by painting the opposite deviation. It shows you what ought to be by what ought not to be; where complete, it reminds you of the perfect image, by showing you the distorted and imperfect image. Of this art we possess in the present generation one prolific master. Mr. Browning is an artist working by incongruity. Possibly hardly one of his most considerable efforts can be found which is not great because of its odd mixture. He puts together things which no one else would have put together, and produces on our minds a result which no one else would have produced, or tried to produce. His admirers may not like all we may have to say of him. But in our way we too are among his admirers. No one ever read him without seeing not only his great ability but his great *mind*. He not only possesses superficial useable talents, but the strong something, the inner secret something, which uses them and controls them; he is great not in mere accomplishments, but in himself. He has applied a hard strong intellect to real life; he has applied the same intellect to the problems of his age. He has striven to know what *is*: he has endeavoured not to be cheated by counterfeits, not to be infatuated with illusions. His heart is in what he says. He has battered his brain against his creed till he believes it. He has accom-

plishments too, the more effective because they are mixed. He is at once a student of mysticism and a citizen of the world. He brings to the club-sofa distinct visions of old creeds, intense images of strange thoughts he takes to the bookish student tidings of wild Bohemia, and little traces of the *demi-monde*. He puts down what is good for the naughty, and what is naughty for the good. Over women his easier writings exercise that imperious power which belongs to the writings of a great man of the world upon such matters. He knows women, and therefore they wish to know him.

.

It may seem perhaps to most readers that these lines¹ are very difficult, and that they are unpleasant. And so they are. We quote them to illustrate, not the *success* of grotesque art, but the *nature* of grotesque art. It shows the end at which this species of art aims, and if it fails it is from overboldness in the choice of a subject by the artist, or from the defects of its execution. A thinking faculty more in difficulties—a great type—an inquisitive, searching intellect under more disagreeable conditions, with worse helps, more likely to find falsehood, less likely to find truth, can scarcely be imagined. Nor is the mere description of the thought at all bad: on the contrary, if we closely examine it, it is very clever. (Hardly any one could have amassed so many ideas at once nasty and suitable.) But scarcely any readers—any casual readers—who are not of the sect of Mr. Browning's admirers will be able to examine it enough to appreciate it. From a defect, partly of subject, and partly of style, many of Mr. Browning's works make a demand upon the reader's zeal and sense of duty to which the nature of most readers is unequal. They have on the turf the convenient expression 'staying power': some horses can hold on and others cannot. But hardly any reader not of especial and peculiar nature

¹ ll 1-11, 24-56 from *Caliban upon Setebos*.

can hold on through such composition. There is not enough of 'staying power' in human nature. (One of his greatest admirers once owned to us that he seldom or never began a new poem without looking on in advance, and foreseeing with caution what length of intellectual adventure he was about to commence. Whoever will work hard at such poems will find much mind in them: they are a sort of quarry of ideas, but whoever goes there will find these ideas in such a jagged, ugly, useless shape that he can hardly bear them)

SWINBURNE

From his Introduction to the *Works* of George Chapman, 1871

THE charge of obscurity is perhaps of all charges the likeliest to impair the fame or to imperil the success of a rising or an established poet. It is as often misapplied by hasty or ignorant criticism as any other on the roll of accusations; and was never misapplied more persistently and perversely than to an eminent writer of our own time. (The difficulty found by many in certain of Mr. Browning's works arises from a quality the very reverse of that which produces obscurity properly so called. Obscurity is the natural product of turbid forces and confused ideas; of a feeble and clouded or of a vigorous but unfixed and chaotic intellect. Such a poet as Lord Brooke, for example, . . . overcharged with overflowing thoughts, is not sufficiently possessed by any one leading idea, or attracted towards any one central point, to see with decision the proper end and use with resolution the proper instruments of his design. Now if there is any great quality more perceptible than another in Mr. Browning's intellect it is his decisive and incisive faculty of thought, his sureness and intensity of perception, his rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. To charge him with obscurity is about as accurate as to call Lynceus purblind or complain of the sluggish action of the telegraphic wire. He is some-

thing too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity, or even to realize with what spider-like swiftness and sagacity his building spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated line of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled from the inexhaustible fire of his imagination. He never thinks but at full speed, and the rate of his thought is to that of another man's as the speed of a railway to that of a waggon or the speed of a telegraph to that of a railway. It is hopeless to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the contact of the writer's. To do justice to any book which deserves any other sort of justice than that of the fire or the waste-paper basket, it is necessary to read it in the fit frame of mind; and the proper mood in which to study for the first time a book of Mr. Browning's is the freshest, clearest, most active mood of the mind in its brightest and keenest hours of work. Read at such a time, and not 'with half-shut eyes falling asleep in a half-dream', it will be found (in Chapman's phrase) 'pervial' enough to any but a sluggish or a sandblind eye, but at no time and in no mood will a really obscure writer be found other than obscure. The difference between the two is the difference between smoke and lightning; and it is far more difficult to pitch the tone of your thought in harmony with that of a foggy thinker than with that of one whose thought is electric in its motion. To the latter we have but to come with an open and pliant spirit, untired and undisturbed by the work or the idleness of the

day, and we cannot but receive a vivid and active pleasure in following the swift and fine radiations, the subtle play and keen vibration of its sleepless fires ; and the more steadily we trace their course the more surely do we see that all these forked flashes of fancy and changing lights of thought move unerringly around one centre and strike straight in the end to one point. Only random thinking and random writing produce obscurity, and these are the radical faults of Chapman's style of poetry. We find no obscurity in the lightning, whether it play about the heights of metaphysical speculation or the depths of character and motive ; the mind derives as much of vigorous enjoyment from the study by such light of the one as of the other. The action of so bright and swift a spirit gives insight as it were to the eyes and wings to the feet of our own ; the reader's apprehension takes fire from the writer's, and he catches from a subtler and more active mind the infection of spiritual interest, so that any candid and clear-headed student finds himself able to follow for the time in fancy the lead of such a thinker with equal satisfaction on any course of thought or argument ; when he sets himself to refute Renan through the dying lips of St. John or to try conclusions with Strauss in his own person, and when he flashes at once the whole force of his illumination full upon the inmost thought and mind of the most infamous criminal, a Guido Franceschini or a Louis Bonaparte, compelling the black and obscene abyss of such a spirit to yield up at last the secret of its profoundest sophistries, and let forth the serpent of a soul that lies coiled under all the most intricate and supple reasonings of self-justified and self-conscious crime. And thanks to this very quality of vivid spiritual illumination we are able to see by the light of the author's mind without being compelled to see with his eyes, or with the eyes of the living mask which he assumes for his momentary impersonation of saint or

sophist, philosopher or malefactor; without accepting one conclusion, conceding one point, or condoning one crime. It is evident that to produce any such effect requires above all things brightness and decision as well as subtlety and pliancy of genius; and this is the supreme gift and distinctive faculty of Mr. Browning's mind.

HENRY JAMES

Browning in Westminster Abbey

(1890)

From *Essays in London and Elsewhere*, 1893

... FOR the rest, judging from the outside and with his contemporaries, we of the public can only feel that his very modernness—by which we mean the all-touching, all-trying spirit of his work, permeated with accumulations and playing with knowledge—achieves a kind of conquest, or at least of extension, of the rigid pale. We cannot enter here upon any account either of that or of any other element of his genius, though surely no literary figure of our day seems to sit more unconsciously for the painter. (The very imperfections of this original are fascinating, for they never present themselves as weaknesses—they are boldnesses and overgrowths, rich roughnesses and humours—and the patient critic need not despair of digging to the primary soil from which so many disparities and contradictions spring. He may finally even put his finger on some explanation of the great mystery, the imperfect conquest of the poetic form by a genius in which the poetic passion had such volume and range. He may successfully say how it was that a poet without a lyre—for that is practically Browning's deficiency: he had the scroll, but not often the sounding strings—was nevertheless, in his best hours, wonderfully rich in the magic of his art, a magnificent master of poetic emotion.

He will justify on behalf of a multitude of devotees the great position assigned to a writer of verse of which the nature or the fortune has been (in proportion to its value and quantity) to be treated rarely as quotable. He will do all this and a great deal more beside ; but we need not wait for it to feel that something of our latest sympathies, our latest and most restless selves, passed the other day into the high part—the show-part, to speak vulgarly—of our literature.

But the illustrious whom he rejoins may be reassured, as they will not fail to discover. in so far as they are representative it will clear itself up that, in spite of a surface unsuggestive of marble and a reckless individualism of form, he is quite as representative as any of them. For the great value of Browning is that at bottom, in all the deep spiritual and human essentials, he is unmistakably in the great tradition—is, with all his Italianisms and cosmopolitanisms, all his victimisation by societies organised to talk about him, a magnificent example of the best and least dilettantish English spirit. That constitutes indeed the main chance for his eventual critic, who will have to solve the refreshing problem of how, if subtleties be not what the English spirit most delights in, the author of, for instance, *Any Wife to any Husband* made them his perpetual pasture and yet remained typically of his race. He was indeed a wonderful mixture of the universal and the alembicated. But he played with the curious and the special, they never submerged him, and it was a sign of his robustness that he could play to the end. His voice sounds loudest, and also clearest, for the things that, as a race, we like best—the fascination of faith, the acceptance of life, the respect for its mysteries, the endurance of its charges, the vitality of the will, the validity of character, the beauty of action, the seriousness, above all, of the real human passion. If Browning had spoken for us in no

other way he ought to have been made sure of, tamed and chained as a classic, on account of the extraordinary beauty of his treatment of the special relation between man and woman. It is a complete and splendid picture of the matter, which somehow places it at the same time in the region of conduct and responsibility. But when we talk of Robert Browning's speaking 'for us' we go to the end of our privilege, we say all. With a sense of security, perhaps even a certain complacency, we leave our sophisticated modern conscience, and perhaps even our heterogeneous modern vocabulary, in his charge among the illustrious. There will possibly be moments in which these things will seem to us to have widened the allowance, made the high abode more comfortable for some of those who are yet to enter it.

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

From Corrected Impressions, 1895

I DO not know that there is any English writer to whom the motto *Qualis ab incepto* may be applied with more propriety than to Robert Browning,—any whose works are more intimately connected with his life. I am not one of those who take a very great interest in the biography of poets, and I think that its importance as illustrating their works has been as a rule exaggerated. But certainly, if a tolerably instructed student of books and men were set the problem of Browning's works without any knowledge of Browning's life, it would not give him much trouble to lay down the main lines of the latter. A man who had had to write for a living, or to devote himself to writing in the intervals of any regular occupation, could hardly have produced so much and have produced it with such a complete disregard of the public taste and the consequent chances of profit. A man who had had the advantages of that school and university education which as a rule happens to the upper

and upper-middle classes of Englishmen would hardly have produced his work with such an entire disregard of authority as well as of popularity. The first influence was no doubt wholly good, for, copy-books notwithstanding, the instances of men who without private means or practical sinecures have produced large quantities of very fine poetry are very rare, and for the last couple of centuries almost non-existent. The circumstances of Browning's education, on the other hand, no doubt had a good influence as well as a bad. It is open to any one to contend that his natural genius was too irregular, too recalcitrant to the file, to have admitted the labour of that instrument; and that therefore, if he had had a classical and critical taste implanted in him, the struggle of the two would have condemned him to silence. But it is quite certain that his worst faults are exactly those of a privately educated middle-class Englishman, and it is of the very highest interest to compare his career and performance in this respect with the career and performance of Mr. Ruskin, who was in many respects his analogue in genius and circumstances, but whose sojourn at Oxford gave just the differentiating touch.

Allow however, as we may, less or more influence to these things, I think it will hardly be denied that the effect manifested itself very early, and that even by the appearance of *Bells and Pomegranates* prediction of their author's characteristics and career as a whole was pretty easy. It certainly had become so by the time that I myself . . . was 'entered' in Browning. It was obvious on the credit side that here was a man with an almost entirely novel conception of poetical vocabulary and style, with a true and wonderful lyrical gift, with a faculty of argument and narrative in verse which, diametrically as it was opposed in kind to the Drydenian tradition, had been in kind and volume unsurpassed since Dryden, and with an enormous range

and versatility of subject. He could, it was clear, not merely manipulate words and verse in a manner almost suggesting prestidigitation, but was also much more than a mere word- and metre-monger. On certain sides of the great problem of life he could think with boldness and originality, if not with depth: the depth of Mr. Browning's thought belongs to the same mistaken tradition as his obscurity, and reminds me of those inky pools in the limestone districts which look and are popularly reputed to be bottomless till somebody tries them and finds them to be about nineteen foot two. He had above all a command of the most universally appealing, if not also the loftiest, style of poetry,—that which deals with love,—hardly equalled by the very greatest, and not often excelled even by them.

But these great merits were accompanied by uncommon and sometimes very ugly defects. It was obvious that his occasional cacophonies and vulgarities were not merely an exaggeration of his recognition of the truth that the vernacular can be made to impart vigour, and that discords and degradations of scale and tone heighten and brighten musical effects. They were at any rate sometimes clearly the result of a combination of indolence and bad taste,—indolence that would not take the trouble to remove, bad taste that did not fully perceive, the gravity of the blemishes that wanted removing in his very finest passages. There was also that most fatal defect which the ill-natured fairy so often annexes to the gifts of vigorous and fertile command of language,—an excessive voluminousness and volubility. Lastly there was the celebrated 'obscurity', which taken to pieces and judged coolly was simply the combined result of the good and bad gifts just mentioned. Mr. Browning had plenty to say on whatsoever subject he took up; he had a fresh, original, vigorous manner of saying it; he was naturally inclined to and had indulged his inclination for

odd and striking locutions; he was very allusive; and he was both impatient of the labour of correction and rather insensitive to the necessity of it. Hence what he himself has rather damagingly called in a probably unintentional satire and caricature of himself the 'monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrendous demoniaco-seraphic penman's latest piece of graphic' which occurs so often in his work, which the admirers take for something very obscure but very precious, requiring the aid of Browning dictionaries and so forth, which the honest public gapes at, from which the primmer kind of academic critic turns away disgusted, and which more catholic and tolerant appreciation regards, if not exactly with disgust, certainly with regret and disapproval.

F. L. LUCAS

From *Ten Victorian Poets*, 1940

AS we look back to-day on Browning's life and work, both alike seem to me to gain a sudden interest at the point where he turns from a rather childish philosopher into a passionate human being. His early years had lacked colour: he grew up in a comfortable, uneventful home in Camberwell and, when his father said, 'Well, Robert, what are you going to be?', Robert had only to reply that he thought he would be a poet, and sit down to prepare himself for that vocation by reading through Johnson's *Dictionary*. Then in 1845, when he was three-and-thirty and might have complained with much more justice than Byron at that age,

What has life, then, brought to me?
Nothing except thirty-three,

something happened. He suddenly sat down and wrote to a completely strange lady: 'I love your books, dear Miss Barrett, and I love you too'. There is no need to recall that mid-Victorian love-story, as moving as Rossetti's or Meredith's, which still forms the subject of a new book once every

six months—the pale little poetess, Elizabeth Barrett, with her black, spaniel ringlets, shuttered up in a darkened room in Wimpole Street; that terrible patriarch her father, with his West Indian slaves and his mansion in Herefordshire built so appropriately in the Turkish style, whose first and last commandment to his sons and daughters was, ‘Thou shalt not marry’, and whose transports of fury at the mere mention of an engagement used to leave the miserable culprit swooning in the arms of her half-swooning sisters; and then the gradual miracle by which the supposed hopeless invalid was fascinated by her lover into that audacious flight to Italy. ‘So’, commented Wordsworth, ‘Robert Browning and Miss Barrett have gone off together. I hope they understand each other; no one else would.’ They did—with a completeness few married couples have ever equalled. Mr. Barrett’s comments are not recorded; but he never forgave his daughter, never condescended to open her letters though, in the state of her health, for all he knew they might have contained the news that she was dying. His children had judged him only too well; as Elizabeth put it: ‘If a prince from Eldorado should come with a pedigree of lineal descent from some signiory in the moon in one hand, and a ticket of good behaviour from the nearest Independent Chapel in the other . . . “Why even then”, said my sister Arabella, “it would not do”.’ To explain Mr. Barrett, indeed, it needed Dr. Freud.

But after this one burst of romance Browning’s life settled down again into that even tenour which it kept till its end at Venice in 1889. And so the year 1845 remains almost as central in his career as 1850 in Tennyson’s. It produced what seems to me one of his best single volumes, *Dramatic Romances*; it produced his own romance with Elizabeth Barrett: the memorial of which, in its turn, is his most famous work, *The Ring and the Book*. For Browning would

never have written that with such passion, had he not seen in the frail little Pompilia his own dead wife, and in her rescue by the priest Caponsacchi a counterpart of that elopement from Wimpole Street more than twenty years before

And so it is, I think, the Browning who feels, that matters; not the Browning who speculates about the Universe. For his speculations were rather a South Sea Bubble, however brightly coloured. But just as Tennyson outlives his own prophecies, as a painter of sky and earth, a musician of wave and tree, so Browning becomes worth hearing when he turns from his preaching to catch the leap of a lover's pulse or the answering flush on a girl's face. It is his lovers that live, just as the loves of Horace have outlived all the laws of Augustus,—happy or tragic, faithful or faithless; triumphant in their brief pride above the dust of a dead city, while the sheep-bells tinkle where its belfries tolled, or saddened amid the desolate indifference of the Roman Campagna, or stepping gaily from a gondola in Venice to meet the dagger gleaming in the archway's gloom; now watching the alchemist pound the blue poison for a rival's lips, or quietly strangling a fickle mistress, so as to keep her always, with her own long, coiling hair; now pressing a rose-leaf for remembrance in a dead girl's hand, or riding for the last time on earth with a woman loved in vain, or remembering sadly, yet gladly, on a death-bed the stolen meetings of long ago. The same fine vitality breathes in Browning's treatment of other sides of human life, whenever there is no ill-pointed moral being dug into the reader's ribs—when the Duke of Ferrara describes his last Duchess, or Caliban sits creating his god Setebos in his own image, or Childe Roland comes to the cursed Tower among the sunset hills. Where Browning is content to be a pure artist, he can be a vivid one. Of course the Browning Societies with typical

English Philistinism wanted a moral even for *Childe Roland*; an adulterous generation asking for a sign, they approached the author; but for once they had to go empty away. It was just a dream-fantasy made from a phrase in Shakespeare, a horse in a tapestry, a tower seen in the Carrara Mountains—he forgot the rest. But perhaps of all these characters the most brilliant is the Bishop who orders his tomb at St. Praxed's, with his naïve and nonchalant Renaissance way of serving at once Jove and Jehovah, Aphrodite and Mary of Nazareth.

Selections from
ROBERT BROWNING

From PAULINE

1833

ANDROMEDA!

And she is with me: years roll, I shall change,
 But change can touch her not—so beautiful
 With her fixed eyes, earnest and still, and hair
 Lifted and spread by the salt-sweeping breeze, 5
 And one red beam, all the storm leaves in heaven,
 Resting upon her eyes and hair, such hair,
 As she awaits the snake on the wet beach
 By the dark rock and the white wave just breaking
 At her feet; quite naked and alone; a thing 10
 I doubt not, nor fear for, secure some god
 To save will come in thunder from the stars.

LYRICS FROM 'PARACELSUS'

1835

I

HEAP cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
 Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
 Smeared with dull nard an Indian wipes
 From out her hair: such balsam falls
 Down sea-side mountain pedestals, 5
 From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
 Spent with the vast and howling main,
 To treasure half their island-gain.

And strew faint sweetness from some old
 Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud 10
 Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
 Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
 From closet long to quiet vowed,

With mothed and dropping arras hung,
 Mouldering her lute and books among, 15
 As when a queen, long dead, was young.

II

OVER the sea our galleys went,
 With cleaving prows in order brave
 To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,
 A gallant armament:
 Each bark built out of a forest-tree, 5
 Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
 And nailed all over the gaping sides,
 Within and without, with black bull-hides,
 Seethed in fat and suppled in flame,
 To bear the playful billows' game: 10
 So, each good ship was rude to see,
 Rude and bare to the outward view,
 But each upbore a stately tent
 Where cedar-pales in scented row
 Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine, 15
 And an awning drooped the mast below,
 In fold on fold of the purple fine,
 That neither noontide nor starshine
 Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,
 Might pierce the regal tenement. 20
 When the sun dawned, oh, gay and glad
 We set the sail and plied the oar;
 But when the night-wind blew like breath,
 For joy of one day's voyage more,
 We sang together on the wide sea, 25
 Like men at peace on a peaceful shore;
 Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,
 Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
 And in a sleep as calm as death,

We, the voyagers from afar, 30
 Lay stretched along, each weary crew
 In a circle round its wondrous tent
 Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,
 And with light and perfume, music too:
 So the stars wheeled round, and the darkness past, 35
 And at morn we started beside the mast,
 And still each ship was sailing fast!

Now, one morn, land appeared—a speck
 Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky:
 ‘Avoid it,’ cried our pilot, ‘check 40
 The shout, restrain the eager eye!’
 But the heaving sea was black behind
 For many a night and many a day,
 And land, though but a rock, drew nigh;
 So, we broke the cedar pales away, 45
 Let the purple awning flap in the wind,
 And a statue bright was on every deck!
 We shouted, every man of us,
 And steered right into the harbour thus,
 With pomp and paeon glorious. 50

A hundred shapes of lucid stone!
 All day we built its shrine for each,
 A shrine of rock for every one,
 Nor paused till in the westering sun
 We sat together on the beach 55
 To sing because our task was done.
 When lo! what shouts and merry songs!
 What laughter all the distance stirs!
 A loaded raft with happy throngs
 Of gentle islanders! 60
 ‘Our isles are just at hand,’ they cried,
 ‘Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping;

Our temple-gates are opened wide,
 Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping
 For these majestic forms'—they cried. 65
 Oh, then we awoke with sudden start
 From our deep dream, and knew, too late,
 How bare the rock, how desolate,
 Which had received our precious freight:
 Yet we called out—'Depart! 70
 Our gifts, once given, must here abide.
 Our work is done; we have no heart
 To mar our work,'—we cried.

III

THUS the Mayne glideth
 Where my Love abideth.
 Sleep's no softer: it proceeds
 On through lawns, on through meads,
 On and on, whate'er befall, 5
 Meandering and musical,
 Though the niggard pasturage
 Bears not on its shaven ledge
 Aught but weeds and waving grasses
 To view the river as it passes, 10
 Save here and there a scanty patch
 Of primroses, too faint to catch
 A weary bee. . . .
 And scarce it pushes
 Its gentle way through strangling rushes,
 Where the glossy kingfisher 15
 Flutters when noon-heats are near,
 Glad the shelving banks to shun,
 Red and steaming in the sun,
 Where the shrew-mouse with pale throat
 Burrows, and the speckled stoat; 20

Where the quick sandpipers flit
 In and out the marl and grit
 That seems to breed them, brown as they:
 Nought disturbs its quiet way,
 Save some lazy stork that springs, 25
 Trailing it with legs and wings,
 Whom the shy fox from the hill
 Rouses, creep he ne'er so still.

From SORDELLO

1840

DANTE, pacer of the shore
 Where gluttoned hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
 Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
 Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
 Into a darkness quieted by hope; 5
 Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
 In gracious twilights where his chosen lie.

From PIPPA PASSES

Bells and Pomegranates, 1, 1841

I

DAY!
 Faster and more fast,
 O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
 Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
 Where spurting and suppressed it lay, 5
 For not a froth-flake touched the rim
 Of yonder gap in the solid gray
 Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
 But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
 Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed, 10
 Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
 Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

II

THE year's at the spring
 And day's at the morn;
 Morning's at seven;
 The hill-side's dew-pearled;
 The lark's on the wing; 5
 The snail's on the thorn:
 God's in his heaven—
 All's right with the world!

III

A KING lived long ago,
 In the morning of the world,
 When earth was nigher heaven than now:
 And the king's locks curled,
 Disparting o'er a forehead full 5
 As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
 Of some sacrificial bull—
 Only calm as a babe new-born:
 For he was got to a sleepy mood,
 So safe from all decrepitude, 10
 Age with its bane, so sure gone by,
 (The gods so loved him while he dreamed)
 That, having lived thus long, there seemed
 No need the king should ever die.

Among the rocks his city was: 15
 Before his palace, in the sun,
 He sat to see his people pass,
 And judge them every one
 From its threshold of smooth stone.
 They haled him many a valley-thief 20
 Caught in the sheep-pens, robber-chief
 Swarthy and shameless, beggar-cheat,

Spy-prowler, or rough pirate found
 On the sea-sand left aground ;
 And sometimes clung about his feet, 25
 With bleeding lip and burning cheek,
 A woman, bitterest wrong to speak
 Of one with sullen thickset brows:
 And sometimes from the prison-house
 The angry priests a pale wretch brought, 30
 Who through some chink had pushed and pressed
 On knees and elbows, belly and breast,
 Worm-like into the temple,—caught
 He was by the very god,
 Who ever in the darkness strode 35
 Backward and forward, keeping watch
 O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch!
 These, all and every one,
 The king judged, sitting in the sun.

His councillors, on left and right, 40
 Looked anxious up,—but no surprise
 Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes
 Where the very blue had turned to white.
 'Tis said, a Python scared one day
 The breathless city, till he came, 45
 With forky tongue and eyes on flame,
 Where the old king sat to judge alway;
 But when he saw the sweepy hair
 Girt with a crown of berries rare
 Which the god will hardly give to wear 50
 To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare
 In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,
 At his wondrous forest rites,—
 Seeing this, he did not dare
 Approach that threshold in the sun, 55

Assault the old king smiling there.
Such grace had kings when the world begun!

IV

You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartfelt now: some seed 5
At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like.

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet: 10
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.
What's death! You'll love me yet!

MY LAST DUCHESS

FERRARA

Bells and Pomegranates, iii, 1842

THAT's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said 5
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) 10
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 't was not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps 15
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat;' such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast, 25
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill 35
 In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me, here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; 45
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

II

As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, 55
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER

Bells and Pomegranates, iii, 1842

I

GR-R-R—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
 Water your damned flower-pots, do!
 If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!
 What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming? 5
 Oh, that rose has prior claims—
 Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
 Hell dry you up with its flames!

II

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear 10
 Wise talk of the kind of weather,
 Sort of season, time of year.
Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for 'parsley'? 15
 What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

12

III

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
 Laid with care on our own shelf!
 With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
 And a goblet for ourself, 20
 Rinsed like something sacrificial
 Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps—
 Marked with L. for our initial!
 (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores 25
 Squats outside the Convent bank
 With Sanchicha, telling stories,
 Steeping tresses in the tank,
 Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
 —Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30
 Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
 (That is, if he'd let it show!)

V

When he finishes refection,
 Knife and fork he never lays
 Cross-wise, to my recollection, 35
 As do I, in Jesu's praise.
 I the Trinity illustrate,
 Drinking watered orange-pulp—
 In three sips the Arian frustrate;
 While he drains his at one gulp. 40

VI

Oh, those melons? If he's able
 We're to have a feast! so nice!
 One goes to the Abbot's table,
 All of us get each a slice.

13

How go on your flowers? None double? 45
 Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
 Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble,
 Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

VII

There's a great text in Galatians,
 Once you trip on it, entails 50
 Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
 One sure, if another fails:
 If I trip him just a-dying,
 Sure of heaven as sure can be,
 Spin him round and send him flying 55
 Off to hell, a Manichee?

VIII

Or, my scrofulous French novel
 On grey paper with blunt type!
 Simply glance at it, you grovel
 Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60
 If I double down its pages
 At the woeful sixteenth print,
 When he gathers his greengages,
 Ope a sieve and shp it in't?

IX

Or, there's Satan!—one might venture 65
 Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
 Such a flaw in the indenture
 As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
 Blasted lay that rose-acacia
 We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine . . .* 70
 'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ*
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r—you swine!

He sings

I SEND my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing.
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

She speaks

Say after me, and try to say
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord, 10
In your own voice, in your own way:
'This woman's heart and soul and brain
Are mine as much as this gold chain
She bids me wear; which' (say again)
'I choose to make by cherishing 15
A precious thing, or choose to fling
Over the boat-side, ring by ring.'
And yet once more say . . . no word more!
Since words are only words. Give o'er!

Unless you call me, all the same, 20
Familiarly by my pet name,
Which, if the Three should hear you call,
And me reply to, would proclaim
At once our secret to them all
Ask of me, too, command me, blame— 25
Do, break down the partition-wall
'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
Curtained in dusk and splendid folds!

15

What's left but—all of me to take?
 I am the Three's: prevent them, slake 30
 Your thirst! 'Tis said, the Arab sage,
 In practising with gems, can loose
 Their subtle spirit in his cruce
 And leave but ashes: so, sweet mage,
 Leave them my ashes when thy use 35
 Sucks out my soul, thy heritage!

He sings

I

Past we glide, and past, and past!
 What's that poor Agnese doing
 Where they make the shutters fast?
 Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing 40
 To his couch the purchased bride:
 Past we glide!

II

Past we glide, and past, and past!
 Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
 Like a beacon to the blast? 45
 Guests by hundreds, not one caring
 If the dear host's neck were wried:
 Past we glide!

She sings

I

The moth's kiss, first!
 Kiss me as if you made believe 50
 You were not sure, this eve,
 How my face, your flower, had pursed
 Its petals up; so, here and there
 You brush it, till I grow aware
 Who wants me, and wide ope I burst. 55

II

The bee's kiss, now!
 Kiss me as if you entered gay
 My heart at some noonday,
 A bud that dares not disallow
 The claim, so all is rendered up, 60
 And passively its shattered cup
 Over your head to sleep I bow.

He sings

I

What are we two?
 I am a Jew,
 And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue, 65
 To a feast of our tribe;
 Where they need thee to bribe
 The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe
 Thy . . . Scatter the vision for ever! And now,
 As of old, I am I, thou art thou! 70

II

Say again, what we are?
 The sprite of a star,
 I lure thee above where the destinies bar
 My plumes their full play
 Till a ruddier ray 75
 Than my pale one announce there is withering away
 Some . . . Scatter the vision for ever! And now,
 As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

He muses

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?
 The land's lap or the water's breast? 80
 To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
 Or swim in lucid shallows just
 Eluding water-lily leaves,

An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
 To lock you, whom release he must ; 85
 Which life were best on Summer eves ?

He speaks, musing

Lie back ; could thought of mine improve you ?
 From this shoulder let there spring
 A wing ; from this, another wing ;
 Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you ! 90
 Snow-white must they spring, to blend
 With your flesh, but I intend
 They shall deepen to the end,
 Broader, into burning gold,
 Till both wings crescent-wise enfold 95
 Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
 To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
 As if a million sword-blades hurled
 Defiance from you to the world !
 Rescue me thou, the only real ! 100
 And scare away this mad ideal
 That came, nor motions to depart !
 Thanks ! Now, stay ever as thou art !

Still he muses

I

What if the Three should catch at last
 Thy serenader ? While there's cast 105
 Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
 Gian pinions me, Himself has past
 His stylet thro' my back ; I reel ;
 And . . . is it thou I feel ?

II

They trail me, these three godless knaves, 110
 Past every church that saints and saves,
 Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
 By Lido's wet accursed graves,

They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And . . . on thy breast I sink! 115

She replies, musing

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do: thus: were death so unlike sleep,
Caught this way? Death's to fear from flame or steel,
Or poison doubtless; but from water—feel!

Go find the bottom! Would you stay me? There! 120
Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away: since you have praised my hair,
'Tis proper to be choice in what I wear.

He speaks

Row home? must we row home? Too surely 125
Know I where its front's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled;
Window just with window mating,
Door on door exactly waiting,
All's the set face of a child: 130
But behind it, where's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way 135
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead!
First, out a cloud of curtain blew,
Then a sweet cry, and last came you— 140
To catch your lory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.

I scarce could breathe to see you reach 145
 So far back o'er the balcony
 To catch him ere he climbed too high
 Above you in the Smyrna peach
 That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
 This coiled hair on your head, unrolled, 150
 Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
 The Roman girls were wont, of old,
 When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
 To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
 Dear lory, may his beak retain 155
 Ever its delicate rose stain
 As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
 Had marked their thief to know again!

Stay longer yet, for others' sake
 Than mine! what should your chamber do? 160
 —With all its rarities that ache
 In silence while day lasts, but wake
 At night-time and their life renew,
 Suspended just to pleasure you
 Who brought against their will together 165
 These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
 Around them such a magic tether
 That dumb they look: your harp, believe,
 With all the sensitive tight strings
 Which dare not speak, now to itself 170
 Breathes slumberously, as if some elf
 Went in and out the chords, his wings
 Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
 As an angel may, between the maze
 Of midnight palace-pillars, on 175
 And on, to sow God's plagues, have gone
 Through guilty glorious Babylon.

And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
 Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell
 As the dry limpet for the lymph 180
 Come with a tune he knows so well.
 And how your statues' hearts must swell!
 And how your pictures must descend
 To see each other, friend with friend!
 Oh, could you take them by surprise, 185
 You'd find Schidone's eager Duke
 Doing the quaintest courtesies
 To that prim saint by Haste-thee-Luke!
 And, deeper into her rock den,
 Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen 190
 You'd find retreated from the ken
 Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—
 As if the Tizian thinks of her,
 And is not, rather, gravely bent
 On seeing for himself what toys 195
 Are these, his progeny invent,
 What litter now the board employs
 Whereon he signed a document
 That got him murdered! Each enjoys
 Its night so well, you cannot break 200
 The sport up, so, indeed must make
 More stay with me, for others' sake.

She speaks

I

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
 Is used to tie the jasmine back
 That overflows my room with sweets, 205
 Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets
 My Zanze! If the ribbon's black,
 The Three are watching, keep away!

II

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreathe
 A mesh of water-weeds about 210
 Its prow, as if he unaware
 Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair!
 That I may throw a paper out
 As you and he go underneath.

There's Zanze's vigilant taper; safe are we. 215
 Only one minute more to-night with me?
 Resume your past self of a month ago!
 Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
 The lady with the colder breast than snow.
 Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand 220
 More than I touch yours when I step to land,
 And say, 'All thanks, Siora!'—

Heart to heart
 And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we part,
 Clasp me and make me thine, as mine thou art!

He is surprised, and stabbed.

It was ordained to be so, sweet!—and best 225
 Comes now, beneath thine eyes, upon thy breast.
 Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care
 Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
 My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not scorn
 To death, because they never lived· but I 230
 Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more kiss)—can die!

From WARING

Bells and Pomegranates, III, 1842

ICHABOD, Ichabod,
 The glory is departed!
 Travels Waring East away?
 Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,

Reports a man upstarted	5
Somewhere as a god,	
Hordes grown European-hearted,	
Millions of the wild made tame	
On a sudden at his fame?	
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?	10
Or who in Moscow, toward the Czar,	
With the demurest of footfalls	
Over the Kremlin's pavement bright	
With serpentine and syenite,	
Steps, with five other Generals	15
That simultaneously take snuff,	
For each to have pretext enough	
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash	
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff	
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,	20
And leave the grand white neck no gash?	
Waring in Moscow, to those rough	
Cold northern natures borne, perhaps,	
Like the lambwhite maiden dear	
From the circle of mute kings	25
Unable to repress the tear,	
Each as his sceptre down he flings,	
To Dian's fane at Taurica,	
Where now a captive priestess, she alway	
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech	30
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten beach:	
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands	
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian strands	
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry	
Amid their barbarous twitter!	35
In Russia? Never! Spain were fitter!	
Ay, most likely 'tis in Spain	
That we and Waring meet again	

Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
 Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid 40
 All fire and shine, abrupt as when there's slid
 Its stiff gold blazing pall
 From some black coffin-lid.
 Or, best of all,
 I love to think 45
 The leaving us was just a feint;
 Back here to London did he slink,
 And now works on without a wink
 Of sleep, and we are on the brink
 Of something great in fresco-paint: 50
 Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
 Up and down and o'er and o'er
 He splashes, as none splashed before
 Since great Caldara Polidore.
 Or Music means this land of ours 55
 Some favour yet, to pity won
 By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers,—
 'Give me my so-long-promised son,
 Let Waring end what I begun!'
 Then down he creeps and out he steals 60
 Only when the night conceals
 His face; in Kent 'tis cherry-time,
 Or hops are picking: or at prime
 Of March he wanders as, too happy,
 Years ago when he was young, 65
 Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
 And the early moths had sprung
 To life from many a trembling sheath
 Woven the warm boughs beneath;
 While small birds said to themselves 70
 What should soon be actual song,
 And young gnats, by tens and twelves,

Made as if they were the throng
 That crowd around and carry aloft
 The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure, 75
 Out of a myriad noises soft,
 Into a tone that can endure
 Amid the noise of a July noon
 When all God's creatures crave their boon,
 All at once and all in tune, 80
 And get it, happy as Waring then,
 Having first within his ken
 What a man might do with men:
 And far too glad, in the even-glow,
 To mix with the world he meant to take 85
 Into his hand, he told you, so—
 And out of it his world to make,
 To contract and to expand
 As he shut or oped his hand.

PICTOR IGNOTUS

[FLORENCE, 15—]

Dramatis Personae, 1845

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
 Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
 Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
 —Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
 To outburst on your night with all my gift 5
 Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk
 From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
 And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
 To the centre, of an instant; or around
 Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan 10
 The licence and the limit, space and bound,
 Allowed to truth made visible in man.

And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
 Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
 Each face obedient to its passion's law, 15
 Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
 Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
 A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
 Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
 Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place; 20
 Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
 And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—
 O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
 What did ye give me that I have not saved?
 Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!) 25
 Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,
 As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
 To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
 Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
 Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went, 30
 Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
 Through old streets named afresh from the event,
 Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
 My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
 Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!— 35
 Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
 With love about, and praise, till life should end,
 And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
 Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—
 The thought grew frightful, 'twas so wildly dear! 40
 But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
 Have scared me, like the revels through a door
 Of some strange house of idols at its rites!
 This world seemed not the world it was before:
 Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped 45
 . . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun

To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped
 Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
 They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!
 These buy and sell our pictures, take and give, 50
 Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
 And where they live needs must our pictures live
 And see their faces, listen to their prate,
 Partakers of their daily pettiness,
 Discussed of,—‘This I love, or this I hate, 55
 This likes me more, and this affects me less!’
 Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
 My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
 These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
 With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint, 60
 With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—
 At least no merchant traffics in my heart;
 The sanctuary’s gloom at least shall ward
 Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:
 Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine 65
 While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
 They moulder on the damp wall’s travertine,
 ‘Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
 So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
 O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth?
 Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry? 71
 Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

From THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY

PIANO DI SORRENTO

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

FORTÙ, Fortù, my beloved one,
 Sit here by my side,
 On my knees put up both little feet!
 I was sure, if I tried,

I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco. 5
 Now, open your eyes,
 Let me keep you amused till he vanish
 In black from the skies,
 With telling my memories over
 As you tell your beads; 10
 All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
 —The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
 Had net-worked with brown
 The white skin of each grape on the bunches, 15
 Marked like a quail's crown,
 Those creatures you make such account of,
 Whose heads,—speckled white
 Over brown like a great spider's back,
 As I told you last night,— 20
 Your mother bites off for her supper.
 Red-ripe as could be,
 Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
 In halves on the tree:
 And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone, 25
 Or in the thick dust
 On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,
 Wherever could thrust
 Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
 Its yellow face up, 30
 For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
 Some five for one cup.
 So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,
 What change was in store,
 By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets 35
 Which woke me before

I could open my shutter, made fast
 With a bough and a stone,
 And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
 Sole lattice that's known. 40
 Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
 While, busy beneath,
 Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
 The rain in their teeth.
 And out upon all the flat house-roofs 45
 Where split figs lay drying,
 The girls took the frails under cover:
 Nor use seemed in trying
 To get out the boats and go fishing,
 For, under the cliff, 50
 Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
 No seeing our skiff
 Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
 —Our fisher arrive,
 And pitch down his basket before us, 55
 All trembling alive
 With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
 You touch the strange lumps,
 And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
 Of horns and of humps, 60
 Which only the fisher looks grave at,
 While round him like imps
 Cling screaming the children as naked
 And brown as his shrimps;
 Himself too as bare to the middle 65
 —You see round his neck
 The string and its brass coin suspended,
 That saves him from wreck.
 But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,
 So back, to a man, 70

Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
 Grape-harvest began.
 In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,
 Like blood the juice spins,
 While your brother all bare-legged is dancing 75
 Till breathless he grins
 Dead-beaten in effort on effort
 To keep the grapes under,
 Since still when he seems all but master,
 In pours the fresh plunder 80
 From girls who keep coming and going
 With basket on shoulder,
 And eyes shut against the rain's driving;
 Your girls that are older,—
 For under the hedges of aloe, 85
 And where, on its bed
 Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
 Lies pulpy and red,
 All the young ones are kneeling and filling
 Their laps with the snails 90
 Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—
 Your best of regales,
 As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
 When, supping in state,
 We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen, 95
 Three over one plate)
 With lasagne so tempting to swallow
 In slippery ropes,
 And gourds fried in great purple slices,
 That colour of popes. 100
 Meantime, see the grape bunch they've brought you.
 The rain-water slips
 O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
 Which the wasp to your lips

Still follows with fretful persistence: 105
 Nay, taste, while awake,
 This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
 That peels, flake by flake,
 Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;
 Next, sip this weak wine 110
 From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
 A leaf of the vine;
 And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
 That leaves thro' its juice
 The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth. 115
 Scirocco is loose!
 Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
 Which, thick in one's track,
 Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
 Tho' not yet half black! 120
 How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,
 The medlars let fall
 Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
 Snap off, figs and all,
 For here comes the whole of the tempest! 125
 No refuge, but creep
 Back again to my side and my shoulder,
 And listen or sleep.

O how will your country show next week,
 When all the vine-boughs 130
 Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
 The mules and the cows?
 Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
 Your brother, my guide,
 Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles 135
 That offered, each side,
 Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,—

Or strip from the sorbs
 A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,
 Those hairy gold orbs! 140
 But my mule picked his sure sober path out,
 Just stopping to neigh
 When he recognized down in the valley
 His mates on their way
 With the faggots and barrels of water; 145
 And soon we emerged
 From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
 And still as we urged
 Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
 As up still we trudged 150
 Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
 And place was e'en grudged
 'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
 Like the loose broken teeth
 Of some monster which climbed there to die 155
 From the ocean beneath—
 Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
 That clung to the path,
 And dark rosemary ever a-dying
 That, 'spite the wind's wrath, 160
 So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
 And lentisks as staunch
 To the stone where they root and bear berries,
 And . . . what shows a branch
 Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets 165
 Of pale seagreen leaves;
 Over all trod my mule with the caution
 Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
 Still, foot after foot like a lady,
 Till, round after round, 170
 He climbed to the top of Calvano,

And God's own profound
 Was above me, and round me the mountains,
 And under, the sea,
 And within me my heart to bear witness 175
 What was and shall be.
 Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal!
 No rampart excludes
 Your eye from the life to be lived
 In the blue solitudes 180
 Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement:
 Still moving with you;
 For, ever some new head and breast of them
 Thrusts into view
 To observe the intruder; you see it 185
 If quickly you turn
 And, before they escape you, surprise them,
 They grudge you should learn
 How the soft plains they look on, lean over
 And love (they pretend) 190
 —Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
 The wild fruit-trees bend,
 E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut:
 All is silent and grave:
 'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty, 195
 How fair! but a slave.
 So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered
 As greenly as ever
 Those isles of the siren, your Galli:
 No ages can sever 200
 The Three, nor enable their sister
 To join them,—halfway
 On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—
 No farther to-day,
 Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave, 205

Watches breast-high and steady
 From under the rock, her bold sister
 Swum halfway already.
 Fortù, shall we sail there together
 And see from the sides 210
 Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
 Where the siren abides ?
 Shall we sail round and round them, close over
 The rocks, tho' unseen,
 That ruffle the grey glassy water 215
 To glorious green ?
 Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
 Reach land and explore,
 On the largest, the strange square black turret
 With never a door, 220
 Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;
 Then, stand there and hear
 The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
 What life is, so clear ?
 —The secret they sang to Ulysses 225
 When, ages ago,
 He heard and he knew this life's secret
 I hear and I know.

THE LOST LEADER

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

I

JUST for a handful of silver he left us,
 Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
 Lost all the others she lets us devote;
 They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver, 5
 So much was theirs who so little allowed:
 How all our copper had gone for his service!

Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud!
 We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
 Lived in his mild and magnificent eye, 10
 Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
 Made him our pattern to live and to die!
 Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
 Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch from their
 graves!
 He alone breaks from the van and the freemen, 15
 —He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his presence;
 Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre;
 Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his quiescence,
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire: 20
 Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
 One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,
 One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
 One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
 Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
 There would be doubt, hesitation and pain, 26
 Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
 Never glad confident morning again!
 Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
 Menace our heart ere we master his own; 30
 Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
 Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

THE LOST MISTRESS

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

I

ALL's over, then: does truth sound bitter
 As one at first believes?

Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

II

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly, 5
I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully
—You know the red turns grey.

III

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine? 10
Mere friends are we,—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

IV

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever!— 16

V

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer! 20

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, with the next poem, 1845

I

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware, 4
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
 And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows! 10
 Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
 Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
 Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
 That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
 Lest you should think he never could recapture 15
 The first fine careless rapture!
 And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
 All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
 The buttercups, the little children's dower
 —Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower! 20

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died
 away;
 Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
 Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
 In the dimmest North-east distance dawned Gibraltar grand
 and gray;
 'Here and here did England help me: how can I help Eng-
 land?'—say, 5
 Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and
 pray,
 While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

[ROME, 15—.]

VANITY, saith the preacher, vanity!
 Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
 Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well—

She, men would have to be your mother once,
 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! 5
 What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
 And as she died so must we die ourselves,
 And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie 10
 In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
 Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
 'Do I live, am I dead?' Peace, peace seems all.
 Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
 And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought 15
 With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
 —Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
 Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
 He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
 Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence 20
 One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
 And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
 And up into the aery dome where live
 The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:
 And I shall fill my slab of basalt there, 25
 And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
 With those nine columns round me, two and two,
 The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
 Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
 As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse. 30
 —Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
 Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
 Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
 Draw close: that conflagration of my church
 —What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
 My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig 35
 The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,

Drop water gently till the surface sink,
 And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! . . .
 Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft, 40
 And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
 Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
 Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
 Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
 Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all, 45
 That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
 So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
 Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
 Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
 For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
 Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years: 51
 Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
 Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black—
 'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
 Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath? 55
 The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
 Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
 Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
 The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
 Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan 60
 Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
 And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
 Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
 Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
 To revel down my villas while I gasp 65
 Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
 Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
 Nay, boys, ye love me—all of jasper, then!
 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
 My bath must needs be left behind, alas! 70
 One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,

There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world—
 And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
 Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
 And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
 —That's if ye carve my epitaph aright, 76
 Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
 No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line—
 Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
 And then how I shall lie through centuries, 80
 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
 And see God made and eaten all day long,
 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night, 85
 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work: 90
 And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
 About the life before I lived this life,
 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount, 95
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
 —Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best! 100
 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
 All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
 My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul, 105

Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
 And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down, 110
 To comfort me on my entablature
 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
 'Do I live, am I dead?' There, leave me, there!
 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude 114
 To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
 And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
 Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs 120
 —Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
 That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
 Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
 As still he envied me, so fair she was! 125

THE LABORATORY

[ANCIEN RÉGIME]

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

I

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
 May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
 As thou phlest thy trade in this devil's-smithy—
 Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

II

He is with her, and they know that I know 5
 Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
 While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
 Empty church, to pray God in, for them!—I am here.

41

III

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,—I am not in haste! 10
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

IV

That in the mortar—you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue, 15
Sure to taste sweetly,—is that poison too?

V

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket! 20

VI

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

VII

Quick—is it finished? The colour's too grim! 25
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me!
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free 30
The soul from those masculine eyes,—say, 'no!'
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought

Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all! 36

X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace—
He is sure to remember her dying face! 40

XI

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close:
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill, 45
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it—next moment I dance at the King's!

From THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

OURS is a great wild country:
If you climb to our castle's top,
I don't see where your eye can stop;
For when you've passed the cornfield country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed, 5
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow, 10
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,

So, like black priests up, and so
 Down the other side again
 To another greater, wilder country, 15
 That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
 Branched through and through with many a vein
 Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;
 Look right, look left, look straight before,—
 Beneath they mine, above they smelt, 20
 Copper-ore and iron-ore,
 And forge and furnace mould and melt,
 And so on, more and ever more,
 Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
 Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
 —And the whole is our Duke's country. 26

SONG

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, 1845

I

NAY but you, who do not love her,
 Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
 Holds earth aught—speak truth—above her?
 Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
 And this last fairest tress of all, 5
 So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

II

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
 To praise, you search the wide world over:
 Then, why not witness, calmly gazing,
 If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her?
 Above this tress, and this, I touch 11
 But cannot praise, I love so much!

MEETING AT NIGHT

Bells and Pomegranates, vii, with the next poem, as
'Night and Morning', 1845

I

THE grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow, 5
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears,
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match, 10
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

PARTING AT MORNING

ROUND the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

From SAUL

i-ix, *Bells and Pomegranates*, vii, 1845; complete, with ten more
sections, in *Men and Women*, 1855.

I

SAID Abner, 'At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou
speak,
Kiss my cheek, wish me well!' Then I wished it, and did
kiss his cheek.

And he, 'Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance
sent,

3

Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of
praise,

To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back
upon life.

10

II

Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild
heat

13

Were now raging to torture the desert!'

III

Then I, as was meet,

Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was
unlooped;

I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped;
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered
and gone,

That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I
prayed,

20

And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid
But spoke, 'Here is David, thy servant!' And no voice
replied.

At the first I saw nought but the blackness; but soon I
descried

A something more black than the blackness—the vast, the
 upright 24
 Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
 Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
 Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, showed
 Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out
 wide
 On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each
 side;
 He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his
 pangs 30
 And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
 Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
 With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark,
 blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,—took off the lilies we twine round
 its chords
 Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noontide—those
 sunbeams like swords! 35
 And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after
 one,
 So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
 They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have
 fed
 Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's
 bed; 39
 And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
 Into eve and the blue far above us,—so blue and so far!

—Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each
leave his mate

To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has
weight 44

To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside his sand house—
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half
mouse!

God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song,
when hand

Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great
hearts expand 50

And grow one in the sense of this world's life.—And then,
the last song

When the dead man is praised on his journey—‘Bear, bear
him along

With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm-
seeds not here

To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.

Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!’—And then,
the glad chaunt 55

Of the marriage,—first go the young maidens, next, she
whom we vaunt

As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.—And then, the
great march

Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Nought can break; who shall harm them, our friends?—

Then, the chorus intoned

As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned. 60
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened
 apart;
 And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and
 sparkles 'gan dart
 From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a
 start, 64
 All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
 So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there
 erect.
 And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
 As I sang,—

IX

'Oh, our manhood's prime vigour! No spirit feels waste,
 Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
 Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
 The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool
 silver shock 72
 Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
 And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
 And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust
 divine, 75
 And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught
 of wine,
 And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes
 tell
 That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
 How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
 All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!
 Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword
 thou didst guard 81
 When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious
 reward?

Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as
 men sung
 The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint
 tongue 84
 Joining in while it could to the witness, "Let one more attest,
 I have lived, seen God's hand thro' a lifetime, and all was for
 best!"
 Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph, not
 much, but the rest.
 And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working
 whence grew
 Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit
 strained true:
 And the friends of thy boyhood—that boyhood of wonder
 and hope, 90
 Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's
 scope,—
 Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;
 And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head
 combine!
 On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage
 (like the throe 94
 That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the gold go)
 High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning
 them,—all
 Brought to blaze on the head of one creature—King Saul!

X

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,—heart, hand, harp and
 voice, 98
 Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
 Saul's fame in the light it was made for—as when, dare I say,
 The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its
 array,

And upsoareth the cherubim-chariot—'Saul!' cried I, and
 stopped,
 And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who
 hung propped
 By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck by his
 name.
 Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to
 the aim, 105
 And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he
 alone,
 While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad
 bust of stone
 A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,—leaves grasp
 of the sheet?
 Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his
 feet,
 And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your
 mountain of old, 110
 With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold—
 Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow
 and scar
 Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest—all hail,
 there they are!
 —Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the
 nest
 Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on
 his crest 115
 For their food in the ardours of summer. One long shudder
 thrilled
 All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was
 stilled
 At the King's self left standing before me, released and
 aware.

From CHRISTMAS-EVE

1850

SUDDENLY

The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
 Received at once the full fruition
 Of the moon's consummate apparition.
 The black cloud-barricade was riven, 5
 Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
 Deep in the West ; while, bare and breathless,
 North and South and East lay ready
 For a glorious thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
 Sprang across them and stood steady. 10
 'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
 From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
 As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
 It rose, distinctly at the base
 With its seven proper colours chorded, 15
 Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
 Until at last they coalesced,
 And supreme the spectral creature lorded
 In a triumph of whitest white,—
 Above which intervened the night. 20
 But above night too, like only the next,
 The second of a wondrous sequence,
 Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
 Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,
 Another rainbow rose, a mightier, 25
 Fainter, flushier and flightier,—
 Rapture dying along its verge.
 Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
 Whose, from the straining topmost dark,
 On to the keystone of that arc? 30

From EASTER-DAY

1850

I FOUND

Suddenly all the midnight round
 One fire. The dome of heaven had stood
 As made up of a multitude
 Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack 5
 Of ripples infinite and black,
 From sky to sky. Sudden there went,
 Like horror and astonishment,
 A fierce vindictive scribble of red
 Quick flame across, as if one said 10
 (The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
 Burn it!' And straight I was aware
 That the whole ribwork round, minute
 Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
 Was tinted, each with its own spot 15
 Of burning at the core, till clot
 Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
 Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
 As fanned to measure equable,—
 Just so great conflagrations kill 20
 Night overhead, and rise and sink,
 Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
 And wither off the blasted face
 Of heaven, and I distinct might trace
 The sharp black ridgy outlines left 25
 Unburned like network—then, each cleft
 The fire had been sucked back into,
 Regorged, and out it surging flew
 Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
 Till, tolerating to be tamed 30
 No longer, certain rays world-wide
 Shot downwardly. On every side

Caught past escape, the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed; 35
Then, as he winced at his lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth 40
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

I felt begin

The Judgment-Day. 45

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

Men and Women, 1855

I

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

II

Now, the country does not even boast a tree,
 As you see,
 To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills 15
 From the hills
 Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
 Into one)
 Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
 Up like fires 20
 O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
 Bounding all,
 Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
 Twelve abreast.

III

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass 25
 Never was!
 Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
 And embeds
 Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
 Stock or stone— 30
 Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
 Long ago;
 Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
 Struck them tame;
 And that glory and that shame alike, the gold 35
 Bought and sold.

IV

Now,—the single little turret that remains
 On the plains,
 By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
 Overscored, 40
 While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
 Through the chinks—

Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
 Sprang sublime,
 And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced 45
 As they raced,
 And the monarch and his minions and his dames
 Viewed the games.

V

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
 Smiles to leave 50
 To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
 In such peace,
 And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
 Melt away—
 That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair 55
 Waits me there
 In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
 For the goal,
 When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
 Till I come. 60

VI

But he looked upon the city, every side,
 Far and wide,
 All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
 Colonnades,
 All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then, 65
 All the men!
 When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
 Either hand
 On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face, 70
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
 South and North,
 And they built their gods a brazen pillar high 75
 As the sky,
 Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
 Gold, of course.
 Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
 Earth's returns 80
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
 Shut them in,
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
 Love is best.

A LOVERS' QUARREL

Men and Women, 1855

I

Oh, what a dawn of day!
 How the March sun feels like May!
 All is blue again
 After last night's rain,
 And the South dries the hawthorn-spray. 5
 Only, my Love's away!
 I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

II

Runnels, which rillels swell,
 Must be dancing down the dell,
 With a foaming head 10
 On the beryl bed
 Paven smooth as a hermit's cell;
 Each with a tale to tell,
 Could my Love but attend as well.

III

Dearest, three months ago! 15
 When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
 When the wind would edge
 In and in his wedge,
 In, as far as the point could go—
 Not to our ingle, though, 20
 Where we loved each the other so!

IV

Laughs with so little cause!
 We devised games out of straws.
 We would try and trace
 One another's face 25
 In the ash, as an artist draws;
 Free on each other's flaws,
 How we chattered like two church daws!

V

What's in the 'Times'?—a scold
 At the Emperor deep and cold; 30
 He has taken a bride
 To his gruesome side,
 That's as fair as himself is bold:
 There they sit ermine-stoled,
 And she powders her hair with gold. 35

VI

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
 Miles and miles of gold and green
 Where the sunflowers blow
 In a solid glow,
 And—to break now and then the screen— 40
 Black neck and eyeballs keen,
 Up a wild horse leaps between!

VII

Try, will our table turn?
 Lay your hands there light, and yearn
 Till the yearning slips 45
 Thro' the finger-tips
 In a fire which a few discern,
 And a very few feel burn,
 And the rest, they may live and learn!

VIII

Then we would up and pace, 50
 For a change, about the place,
 Each with arm o'er neck:
 'Tis our quarter-deck,
 We are seamen in woeful case.
 Help in the ocean-space! 55
 Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

IX

See, how she looks now, dressed
 In a sledging-cap and vest!
 'Tis a huge fur cloak—
 Like a reindeer's yoke 60
 Falls the lappet along the breast:
 Sleeves for her arms to rest,
 Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

X

Teach me to flirt a fan
 As the Spanish ladies can, 65
 Or I tint your lip
 With a burnt stick's tip
 And you turn into such a man!
 Just the two spots that span
 Half the bill of the young male swan. 70

XI

Dearest, three months ago
 When the mesmerizer Snow
 With his hand's first sweep
 Put the earth to sleep:
 'Twas a time when the heart could show 75
 All—how was earth to know,
 'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro?

XII

Dearest, three months ago
 When we loved each other so,
 Lived and loved the same 80
 Till an evening came,
 When a shaft from the devil's bow
 Pierced to our ingle-glow,
 And the friends were friend and foe!

XIII

Not from the heart beneath— 85
 'Twas a bubble born of breath,
 Neither sneer nor vaunt,
 Nor reproach nor taunt.
 See a word, how it severeth!
 Oh, power of life and death 90
 In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

XIV

Woman, and will you cast
 For a word, quite off at last
 Me, your own, your You,—
 Since, as truth is true, 95
 I was You all the happy past—
 Me do you leave aghast
 With the memories We amassed?

xv

Love, if you knew the light
 That your soul casts in my sight, 100
 How I look to you
 For the pure and true
 And the beauteous and the right,—
 Bear with a moment's spite
 When a mere mote threatens the white! 105

xvi

What of a hasty word?
 Is the fleshly heart not stirred
 By a worm's pin-prick
 Where its roots are quick?
 See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred— 110
 Ear, when a straw is heard
 Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

xvii

Foul be the world or fair
 More or less, how can I care?
 'Tis the world the same 115
 For my praise or blame,
 And endurance is easy there.
 Wrong in the one thing rare—
 Oh, it is hard to bear!

xviii

Here's the spring back or close, 120
 When the almond-blossom blows:
 We shall have the word
 In a minor third
 There is none but the cuckoo knows:
 Heaps of the guelder-rose! 125
 I must bear with it, I suppose.

XIX

Could but November come,
 Were the noisy birds struck dumb
 At the warning slash
 Of his driver's-lash— 130
 I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
 Facing the castle glum
 And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

XX

Then, were the world well stripped
 Of the gear wherein equipped 135
 We can stand apart,
 Heart dispense with heart
 In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
 Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
 We were both in a bare-walled crypt! 140

XXI

Each in the crypt would cry
 'But one freezes here! and why?
 When a heart, as chill,
 At my own would thrill
 Back to life, and its fires out-fly? 145
 Heart, shall we live or die?
 The rest, . . . settle by-and-by!'

XXII

So, she'd efface the score,
 And forgive me as before.
 It is twelve o'clock: 150
 I shall hear her knock
 In the worst of a storm's uproar,
 I shall pull her through the door,
 I shall have her for evermore!

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

Men and Women, 1855

I

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
 The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
 Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

II

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
 There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast; 5
 While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a
 beast.

III

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
 Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
 Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
 —I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned
 wool. 10

IV

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses! Why?
 They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to
 take the eye!
 Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;
 You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who
 hurries by;
 Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun
 gets high; 15
 And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

V

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
 'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off
 the heights:

You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen
 steam and wheeze,
 And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey olive-
 trees. 20

VI

Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
 In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
 'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three
 fingers well,
 The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
 Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick
 and sell. 25

VII

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout
 and splash!
 In the shade it sings and springs; in the shine such foam-
 bows flash
 On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle
 and pash
 Round the lady atop in the conch—fifty gazers do not abash,
 Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in
 a sort of sash. 30

VIII

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
 Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted fore-
 finger.
 Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix i' the corn and
 mingle,
 Or thrud the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
 Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill,
 And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous
 firs on the hill. 36
 Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of the fever
 and chill.

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells
begin:

No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.

By-and-by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets
blood, draws teeth; 41

Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.

At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new play,
piping hot!

And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves
were shot.

Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new
law of the Duke's! 46

Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don
So-and-so

Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome and Cicero,
'And moreover,' (the sonnet goes rhyming,) 'the skirts of
Saint Paul has reached,

Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous
than ever he preached ' 50

Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne
smiling and smart

With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck
in her heart!

Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife;

No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure
in life.

But bless you, it's dear—it's dear! fowls, wine, at double the
rate. 55

They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays
passing the gate

It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!

Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still—ah, the pity, the pity!

Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,

And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding the yellow candles; 60

One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles,

And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:

Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife.

Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

Men and Women, 1855

I

LET's contend no more, Love,

Strive nor weep:

All be as before, Love,

—Only sleep!

II

What so wild as words are? 5

I and thou

In debate, as birds are,

Hawk on bough!

III

See the creature stalking

While we speak! 10

Hush and hide the talking,

Cheek on cheek!

IV

What so false as truth is,
 False to thee?
 Where the serpent's tooth is, 15
 Shun the tree—

V

Where the apple reddens
 Never pry—
 Lest we lose our Edens,
 Eve and I. 20

VI

Be a god and hold me
 With a charm!
 Be a man and fold me
 With thine arm!

VII

Teach me, only teach, Love! 25
 As I ought
 I will speak thy speech, Love,
 Think thy thought—

VIII

Meet, if thou require it,
 Both demands, 30
 Laying flesh and spirit
 In thy hands.

IX

That shall be to-morrow,
 Not to-night:
 I must bury sorrow 35
 Out of sight:

—Must a little weep, Love,
 (Foolish me!)
 And so fall asleep, Love,
 Loved by thee.

40

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
 You need not clap your torches to my face.
 Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
 What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
 And here you catch me at an alley's end 5
 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
 The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
 Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse, 10
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!
 Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take
 Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
 And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend 15
 Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
 Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
 I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
 Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe! 20
 But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
 Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
 Zooks, are we pulchards, that they sweep the streets
 And count fair prize what comes into their net?
 He's Judas to a tittle, that man is! 25

Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends
 Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
 Of the munificent House that harbours me
 (And many more beside, lads! more beside!) 30
 And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
 With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
 With one hand ('Look you, now,' as who should say) 35
 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
 A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down, 40
 You know them and they take you? like enough!
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
 To roam the town and sing out carnival, 46
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mcw,
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
 And saints again. I could not paint all night—
 Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air. 50
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince, 55
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes,

And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
 That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went, 61
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
 All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
 There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
 And after them. I came up with the fun 66
 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
 And so as I was stealing back again 70
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
 You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see! 75
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
 Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting's in that!
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now! 80
 I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day, 85
 My stomach being empty as your hat,
 The wind doubled me up and down I went.
 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
 And so along the wall, over the bridge, 90
 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
 While I stood munching my first bread that month:
 'So, boy, you're minded,' quoth the good fat father

Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
 'To quit this very miserable world ?' 95
 'Will you renounce' . . . 'the mouthful of bread ?' thought I ;
 By no means ! Brief, they made a monk of me ;
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
 Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici 100
 Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
 'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
 And day-long blessed idleness beside ! 105
 'Let's see what the urchin's fit for'—that came next.
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
 Such a to-do ! They tried me with their books :
 Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste !
Flower o' the clove, 110
All the Latin I construe is, 'amo' I love !
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires, 115
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again, 120
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
 How say I ?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less 125
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,

Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge, 130
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
 'Nay,' quoth the Prior, 'turn him out, d'ye say? 136
 'In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
 'What if at last we get our man of parts,
 'We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
 'And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine 140
 'And put the front on it that ought to be!'
 And hereupon he bade me daub away.
 Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white, 145
 I drew them, fat and lean. then, folk at church,
 From good old gossips waiting to confess
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there 150
 With the little children round him in a row
 Of admiration, half for his beard and half
 For that white anger of his victim's son
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ 155
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
 After the passion of a thousand years)
 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf, 160
 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers

(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
 I painted all, then cried 'Tis ask and have;
 'Choose, for more's ready!'—laid the ladder flat,
 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall. 165
 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
 Being simple bodies,—'That's the very man!
 'Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
 'That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes 170
 'To care about his asthma' it's the life!
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and faked;
 Their betters took their turn to see and say:
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face
 And stopped all that in no time. 'How? what's here?
 'Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all! 176
 'Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 'As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
 'Your business is not to catch men with show,
 'With homage to the perishable clay, 180
 'But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 'Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 'Your business is to paint the souls of men—
 'Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
 'It's vapour done up like a new-born babe— 185
 '(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 'It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 'Give us no more of body than shows soul!
 'Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
 'That sets us praising,—why not stop with him? 190
 'Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
 'With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
 'Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 'Rub all out, try at it a second time.
 'Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts, 195

'She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
 'Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
 'Have it all out!' Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further 200
 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
 When what you put for yellow's simply black,
 And any sort of meaning looks intense
 When all beside itself means and looks nought.
 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn, 205
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear, 210
 Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
 And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all— 215
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)
 If you get simple beauty and nought else,
 You get about the best thing God invents.
 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks 220
 'Rub all out!' Well, well, there's my life, in short,
 And so the thing has gone on ever since.
 I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
 You should not take a fellow eight years old
 And make him swear to never kiss the girls. 225
 I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
 Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just

To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse! 230
 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
 The heads shake still—'It's art's decline, my son!
 'You're not of the true painters, great and old;
 'Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find; 235
 'Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
 'Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!'
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mustr . . . manners, and I'll stick to mine!
 I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know! 240
 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
 They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
 To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't;
 For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come 245
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over, 250
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
 In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so, 255
 Although the miller does not preach to him
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.
 What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled for ever one way. As it is, 260
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,

You find abundantly detestable.

For me, I think I speak as I was taught; 265

I always see the garden and God there

A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,

The value and significance of flesh,

I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know. 270

But see, now—why, I see as certainly

As that the morning-star's about to shine,

What will hap some day. We've a youngster here

Comes to our convent, studies what I do,

Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop: 275

His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—

They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—

He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,

I hope so—though I never live so long,

I know what's sure to follow. You be judge! 280

You speak no Latin more than I, belike;

However, you're my man, you've seen the world

—The beauty and the wonder and the power,

The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,

Changes, surprises,—and God made it all! 285

—For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,

For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,

The mountain round it and the sky above,

Much more the figures of man, woman, child,

These are the frame to? What's it all about? 290

To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,

Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.

But why not do as well as say,—paint these

Just as they are, careless what comes of it?

God's works—paint any one, and count it crime 295

To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His works

'Are here already ; nature is complete :
 'Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
 'There's no advantage! you must beat her, then.'
 For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love 300
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that ;
 God uses us to help each other so, 305
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth!
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place, 310
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good.
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink. 315
 'Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!'
 Strikes in the Prior: 'when your meaning's plain
 'It does not say to folk—remember matins,
 'Or, mind you fast next Friday!' Why, for this
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones, 320
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style
 'How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?' 325
 I ask a brother: 'Hugely,' he returns—
 'Already not one phiz of your three slaves
 'Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
 'But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
 'The pious people have so eased their own 330

'With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
 'We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
 'Expect another job this time next year,
 'For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
 'Your painting serves its purpose!' Hang the fools!

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word 336
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, Got wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now! 340
 It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
 . . . There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns! 346
 They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet 350
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
 When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
 Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white 355
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come 360
 Out of a corner when you least expect,
 As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—

Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I'm the man!
 Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear? 365
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
 I, in this presence, this pure company!
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing 370
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—'Not so fast!'—
 —Addresses the celestial presence, 'nay—
 'He made you and devised you, after all,
 'Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—
 'His camel-hair make up a painting-brush? 375
 'We come to brother Lippo for all that,
 '*Iste perfecit opus!*' So, all smile—
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
 Under the cover of a hundred wings
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay 380
 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
 The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go
 The palm of her, the little lily thing 385
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
 And so all's saved for me, and for the church
 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
 Your hand, sir, and good-bye. no lights, no lights! 390
 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
 Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S

Men and Women, 1855

I

Oh Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find'
 I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and
 blind;
 But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy
 mind!

II

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good
 it brings.
 What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants
 were the kings, 5
 Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea
 with rings?

III

Ay, because the sea's the street there, and 'tis arched by
 . . . what you call
 . . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the
 carnival:
 I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all!

IV

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was
 warm in May? 10
 Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to midday,
 When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you
 say?

V

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,—
 On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its
 bed,
 O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base
 his head? 15

VI

Well, and it was graceful of them—they'd break talk off
and afford
—She, to bite her mask's black velvet—he, to finger on
his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavi-
chord?

VII

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished,
sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions—
'Must we die?' 20
Those commiserating sevenths—'Life might last! we can
but try!'

VIII

'Were you happy?'—'Yes.'—'And are you still as happy?'
—'Yes. And you?'
—'Then, more kisses!'—'Did *I* stop them, when a million
seemed so few?'
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

IX

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I
dare say! 25
'Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!
I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!'

X

Then they left you for their pleasure till in due time, one
by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as
well undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see
the sun. 30

XI

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor
 swerve,
 While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close
 reserve,
 In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every
 nerve.

XII

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was
 burned:
 'Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what
 Venice earned. 35
 The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be dis-
 cerned.

XIII

'Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
 Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their
 degree;
 Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it cannot
 be!

XIV

'As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and
 drop, 40
 Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were
 the crop:
 What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to
 stop?

XV

'Dust and ashes!' So you creak it, and I want the heart to
 scold.
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what's become of
 all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and
 grown old. 45

BY THE FIRE-SIDE

Men and Women, 1855

I

How well I know what I mean to do
 When the long dark autumn-evenings come:
 And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?
 With the music of all thy voices, dumb
 In life's November too! 5

II

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
 O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
 While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
 And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
 Not verse now, only prose! 10

III

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
 'There he is at it, deep in Greek:
 Now then, or never, out we slip
 To cut from the hazels by the creek
 A mainmast for our ship!' 15

IV

I shall be at it indeed, my friends:
 Greek puts already on either side
 Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
 To a vista opening far and wide,
 And I pass out where it ends. 20

V

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees:
 But the inside-archway widens fast,
 And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
 And we slope to Italy at last
 And youth, by green degrees. 25

VI

I follow wherever I am led,
 Knowing so well the leader's hand:
 Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
 Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
 Laid to their hearts instead! 30

VII

Look at the ruined chapel again
 Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!
 Is that a tower, I point you plain,
 Or is it a mill, or an iron-forge
 Breaks solitude in vain? 35

VIII

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
 The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
 From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
 The thread of water single and slim,
 Through the ravage some torrent brings! 40

IX

Does it feed the little lake below?
 That speck of white just on its marge
 Is Pella; see, in the evening-glow,
 How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
 When Alp meets heaven in snow! 45

X

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
 And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
 By boulder-stones where lichens mock
 The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
 Their teeth to the polished block. 50

XI

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
 And thorny balls, each three in one,
 The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
 For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun,
 These early November hours, 55

XII

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
 Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
 O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
 And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
 Elf-neededled mat of moss, 60

XIII

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
 Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
 Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
 Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew
 Of toadstools peep indulged. 65

XIV

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
 That takes the turn to a range beyond,
 Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
 Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
 Danced over by the midge. 70

XV

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
 Blackish-grey and mostly wet,
 Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
 See here again, how the lichens fret
 And the roots of the ivy strike! 75

XVI

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
 On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
 To the dozen folk from their scattered homes.
 Gathered within that precinct small
 By the dozen ways one roams— 80

XVII

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
 Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
 Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
 Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
 Their gear on the rock's bare juts. 85

XVIII

It has some pretension too, this front,
 With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
 Set over the porch, Art's early wont:
 'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
 But has borne the weather's brunt— 90

XIX

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
 For a pent-house properly projects
 Where three carved beams make a certain show,
 Dating—good thought of our architect's—
 'Five, six, nine, he lets you know. 95

XX

And all day long a bird sings there,
 And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
 The place is silent and aware;
 It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
 But that is its own affair. 100

XXI

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
 Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
 Whom else could I dare look backward for,
 With whom beside should I dare pursue
 The path grey heads abhor? 105

XXII

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
 Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—
 Not they; age threatens and they contemn,
 Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
 One inch from life's safe hem! 110

XXIII

With me, youth led . . . I will speak now,
 No longer watch you as you sit
 Reading by fire-light, that great brow
 And the spirit-small hand propping it,
 Mutely, my heart knows how— 115

XXIV

When, if I think but deep enough,
 You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;
 And you, too, find without rebuff
 Response your soul seeks many a time
 Piercing its fine flesh-stuff. 120

XXV

My own, confirm me! If I tread
 This path back, is it not in pride
 To think how little I dreamed it led
 To an age so blest that, by its side,
 Youth seems the waste instead? 125

XXVI

My own, see where the years conduct!

At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do ; each is sucked

In each now : on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct. 130

XXVII

Think, when our one soul understands

The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,

How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands? 135

XXVIII

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,

Your heart anticipate my heart,

You must be just before, in fine,

See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine! 140

XXIX

But who could have expected this

When we two drew together first

Just for the obvious human bliss,

To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss? 145

XXX

Come back with me to the first of all,

Let us lean and love it over again,

Let us now forget and now recall,

Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall! 150

XXXI

What did I say ?—that a small bird sings
 All day long, save when a brown pair
 Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
 Strained to a bell: 'gainst noon-day glare
 You count the streaks and rings. 155

XXXII

But at afternoon or almost eve
 'Tis better; then the silence grows
 To that degree, you half believe
 It must get rid of what it knows,
 Its bosom does so heave. 160

XXXIII

Hither we walked then, side by side,
 Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
 And still I questioned or replied,
 While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
 Lay choking in its pride. 165

XXXIV

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
 And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
 And care about the fresco's loss,
 And wish for our souls a like retreat,
 And wonder at the moss. 170

XXXV

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,
 Look through the window's grated square:
 Nothing to see! For fear of plunder,
 The cross is down and the altar bare,
 As if thieves don't fear thunder. 175

XXXVI

We stoop and look in through the grate,
 See the little porch and rustic door,
 Read duly the dead builder's date;
 Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
 Take the path again—but wait! 180

XXXVII

Oh moment, one and infinite!
 The water slips o'er stock and stone;
 The West is tender, hardly bright:
 How grey at once is the evening grown—
 One star, its chrysolite! 185

XXXVIII

We two stood there with never a third,
 But each by each, as each knew well:
 The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
 The lights and the shades made up a spell
 Till the trouble grew and stirred. 190

XXXIX

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
 And the little less, and what worlds away!
 How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
 Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
 And life be a proof of this! 195

XL

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
 So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her:
 I could fix her face with a guard between,
 And find her soul as when friends confer,
 Friends—lovers that might have been. 200

XLI

For my heart had a touch of the woodland-time,
 Wanting to sleep now over its best.
 Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
 But bring to the last leaf no such test!
 'Hold the last fast!' runs the rhyme. 205

XLII

For a chance to make your little much,
 To gain a lover and lose a friend,
 Venture the tree and a myriad such,
 When nothing you mar but the year can mend:
 But a last leaf—fear to touch! 210

XLIII

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
 Eddying down till it find your face
 At some slight wind—best chance of all!
 Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
 You trembled to forestall! 215

XLIV

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
 That hair so dark and dear, how worth
 That a man should strive and agonize,
 And taste a veriest hell on earth
 For the hope of such a prize! 220

XLV

You might have turned and tried a man,
 Set him a space to weary and wear,
 And prove which suited more your plan,
 His best of hope or his worst despair,
 Yet end as he began. 225

XLVI

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
 And filled my empty heart at a word.
 If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
 They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
 One near one is too far. 230

XLVII

A moment after, and hands unseen
 Were hanging the night around us fast;
 But we knew that a bar was broken between
 Life and life: we were mixed at last
 In spite of the mortal screen. 235

XLVIII

The forests had done it; there they stood;
 We caught for a moment the powers at play:
 They had mingled us so, for once and good,
 Their work was done—we might go or stay,
 They relapsed to their ancient mood. 240

XLIX

How the world is made for each of us!
 How all we perceive and know in it
 Tends to some moment's product thus,
 When a soul declares itself—to wit,
 By its fruit, the thing it does! 245

L

Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
 It forwards the general deed of man,
 And each of the Many helps to recruit
 The life of the race by a general plan;
 Each living his own, to boot. 250

LI

I am named and known by that moment's feat;
 There took my station and degree;
 So grew my own small life complete,
 As nature obtained her best of me—
 One born to love you, sweet! 255

LII

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now
 Back again, as you mutely sit
 Musing by fire-light, that great brow
 And the spirit-small hand propping it,
 Yonder, my heart knows how! 260

LIII

So, earth has gained by one man the more,
 And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too;
 And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
 When autumn comes: which I mean to do
 One day, as I said before. 265

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA

Men and Women, 1855

I

THAT was I, you heard last night,
 When there rose no moon at all,
 Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
 Tent of heaven, a planet small:
 Life was dead and so was light. 5

II

Not a twinkle from the fly,
 Not a glimmer from the worm;

When the crickets stopped their cry,
 When the owls forbore a term,
 You heard music ; that was I. 10

III

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
 Sultrily suspired for proof:
 In at heaven and out again,
 Lightning!—where it broke the roof,
 Bloodlike, some few drops of rain 15

IV

What they could my words expressed,
 O my love, my all, my one!
 Singing helped the verses best,
 And when singing's best was done,
 To my lute I left the rest. 20

V

So wore night ; the East was gray,
 White the broad-faced hemlock-flowers:
 There would be another day ,
 Ere its first of heavy hours
 Found me, I had passed away. 25

VI

What became of all the hopes,
 Words and song and lute as well?
 Say, this struck you—'When life gropes
 Feebly for the path where fell
 Light last on the evening slopes, 30

VII

'One friend in that path shall be,
 To secure my step from wrong ;
 One to count night day for me,
 Patient through the watches long,
 Serving most with none to see.' 35

VIII

Never say—as something bodes—
 ‘So, the worst has yet a worse!
 When life halts ’neath double loads,
 Better the taskmaster’s curse
 Than such music on the roads!

40

IX

‘When no moon succeeds the sun,
 Nor can pierce the midnight’s tent
 Any star, the smallest one,
 While some drops, where lightning rent,
 Show the final storm begun—

45

X

‘When the fire-fly hides its spot,
 When the garden-voices fail
 In the darkness thick and hot,—
 Shall another voice avail,
 That shape be where these are not?

50

XI

‘Has some plague a longer lease,
 Proffering its help uncouth?
 Can’t one even die in peace?
 As one shuts one’s eyes on youth,
 Is that face the last one sees?’

55

XII

Oh how dark your villa was,
 Windows fast and obdurate!
 How the garden grudged me grass
 Where I stood—the iron gate
 Ground its teeth to let me pass!

60

MY STAR

Men and Women, 1855

ALL that I know
 Of a certain star
 Is, it can throw
 (Like the angled spar)
 Now a dart of red, 5
 Now a dart of blue;
 Till my friends have said
 They would fain see, too,
 My star that dartles the red and the blue!
 Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
 They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
 What matter to me if their star is a world? 12
 Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

INSTANS TYRANNUS

Men and Women, 1855

I

OF the million or two, more or less,
 I rule and possess,
 One man, for some cause undefined,
 Was least to my mind.

II

I struck him, he grovelled of course— 5
 For, what was his force?
 I pinned him to earth with my weight
 And persistence of hate:
 And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
 As his lot might be worse. 10

III

'Were the object less mean, would he stand
 At the swing of my hand!

For obscurity helps him and blots
 The hole where he squats.'
 So, I set my five wits on the stretch 15
 To inveigle the wretch.
 All in vain! Gold and jewels I threw,
 Still he couched there perdue;
 I tempted his blood and his flesh,
 Hid in roses my mesh, 20
 Choicest cates and the flagon's best spilth:
 Still he kept to his filth.

IV

Had he kith now or kin, were access
 To his heart, did I press:
 Just a son or a mother to seize! 25
 No such booty as these.
 Were it simply a friend to pursue
 'Mid my million or two,
 Who could pay me in person or pelf
 What he owes me himself! 30
 No: I could not but smile through my chafe:
 For the fellow lay safe
 As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
 —Through minuteness, to wit.

V

Then a humour more great took its place 35
 At the thought of his face,
 The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
 The trouble uncouth
 'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
 To put out of its pain. 40
 And, 'No!' I admonished myself,
 'Is one mocked by an elf,

Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
 The gravamen's in that!
 How the lion, who crouches to suit 45
 His back to my foot,
 Would admire that I stand in debate!
 But the small turns the great
 If it vexes you,—that is the thing!
 Toad or rat vex the king? 50
 Though I waste half my realm to unearth
 Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!'

VI

So, I soberly laid my last plan
 To extinguish the man.
 Round his creep-hole, with never a break 55
 Ran my fires for his sake;
 Over-head, did my thunder combine
 With my underground mine:
 Till I looked from my labour content
 To enjoy the event. 60

VII

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
 Did I say 'without friend'?
 Say rather, from marge to blue marge
 The whole sky grew his targe 65
 With the sun's self for visible boss,
 While an Arm ran across
 Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
 Where the wretch was safe prest!
 Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
 The man sprang to his feet, 70
 Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
 —So, *I* was afraid!

'CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME'

Men and Women, 1855.
(See Edgar's song in 'LEAR')

I

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored 5
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh 10
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly 15
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope 21
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

VI

VII

VIII

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two, 50
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view

O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.

I might go on, nought else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw 55
Such starved ignoble nature, nothing throve:
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove. 60

XI

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. 'See
Or shut your eyes,' said Nature peevishly,
'It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place, 65
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free.'

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk 71
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood. 75
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

101

XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
 With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain, 80
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
 I never saw a brute I hated so;
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart. 85
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
 Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights. 90

XVI

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace! 95
 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
 What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.
 Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman's hands
 Pin to his breast a parchment? his own bands 101
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;
 Back therefore to my darkening path again!
 No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain. 105

Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
 I asked when something on the dismal flat
 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path
 As unexpected as a serpent comes. 110
 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
 For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along, 115
 Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
 The river which had done them all the wrong,
 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. 120

XXI

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
 —It may have been a water-rat I speared, 125
 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
 Now for a better country. Vain presage!
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank 130
 Soil to a plash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.

What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?

No foot-print leading to that horrid mews, 135

None out of it. Mad brewage set to work

Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk

Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!

What bad use was that engine for, that wheel, 140

Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel

Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air

Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,

Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood, 145

Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth

Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,

Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood

Changes and off he goes!) within a rood—

Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim, 151

Now patches where some leanness of the soil's

Broke into moss or substances like boils,

Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him

Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim 155

Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!

Nought in the distance but the evening, nought

To point my footstep further! At the thought,

A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend, 160
 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
 That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place 164
 All round to mountains—with such name to grace
 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
 How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you!
 How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then, 171
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
 As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den!

XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once, 175
 This was the place! those two hills on the right,
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
 While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
 Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
 After a life spent training for the sight! 180

XXXI

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
 Bult of brown stone, without a counterpart
 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf 185
 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day
 Came back again for that! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay, 190
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
 ‘Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!’

XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,— 195
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
 To view the last of me, a living frame 200
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
 And blew. ‘*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*’

RESPECTABILITY

Men and Women, 1855

I

DEAR, had the world in its caprice
 Deigned to proclaim ‘I know you both,
 Have recognized your plighted troth,
 Am sponsor for you live in peace!’—
 How many precious months and years 5
 Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
 Before we found it out at last,
 The world, and what it fears?

II

How much of priceless life were spent
 With men that every virtue decks, 10
 And women models of their sex,
 Society's true ornament,—
 Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
 Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
 And feel the Boulevart break again 15
 To warmth and light and bliss?

III

I know! the world proscribes not love;
 Allows my finger to caress
 Your lips' contour and downiness,
 Provided it supply a glove. 20
 The world's good word!—the Institute!
 Guizot receives Montalembert!
 Eh? Down the court three lampions flare:
 Put forward your best foot!

A LIGHT WOMAN

Men and Women, 1855

I

So far as our story approaches the end,
 Which do you pity the most of us three?—
 My friend, or the mistress of my friend
 With her wanton eyes, or me?

II

My friend was already too good to lose, 5
 And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
 When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
 And over him drew her net.

III

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
 A shame, said I, if she adds just him 10
 To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
 The hundredth for a whim!

IV

And before my friend be wholly hers,
 How easy to prove to him, I said,
 An eagle's the game her pride prefers, 15
 Though she snaps at a wren instead!

V

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
 My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
 And round she turned for my noble sake,
 And gave me herself indeed. 20

VI

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
 The wren is he, with his maiden face.
 —You look away and your lip is curled?
 Patience, a moment's space!

VII

For see, my friend goes shaking and white; 25
 He eyes me as the basilisk:
 I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
 Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief: 29
 'Though I love her—that, he comprehends—
 One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
 And be loyal to one's friends!'

IX

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame
 As a pear late basking over a wall;
 Just a touch to try and off it came;
 'Tis mine,—can I let it fall? 35

X

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst!
 Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?
 'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
 When I gave its stalk a twist. 40

XI

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see:
 What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess:
 What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?
 No hero, I confess.

XII

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
 And matter enough to save one's own:
 Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
 He played with for bits of stone! 45

XIII

One likes to show the truth for the truth;
 That the woman was light is very true:
 But suppose she says,—Never mind that youth!
 What wrong have I done to you? 50

XIV

Well, any how, here the story stays,
 So far at least as I understand;
 And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
 Here's a subject made to your hand! 55

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

Men and Women, 1855

I ONLY knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black 5
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did:
The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the threads,
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face, 11
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads nowhither; now, they breathed themselves
On the main promenade just at the wrong time: 15
You'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick 20
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys 25
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognizance of men and things, 30
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;

If any cursed a woman, he took note;
 Yet stared at nobody,—you stared at him,
 And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
 He seemed to know you and expect as much. 35
 So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
 It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
 We had among us, not so much a spy,
 As a recording chief-inquisitor,
 The town's true master if the town but knew! 40
 We merely kept a governor for form,
 While this man walked about and took account
 Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,
 And wrote it fully to our Lord the King 44
 Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,
 And reads them in his bedroom of a night.
 Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,
 A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
 As back into your mind the man's look came.
 Stricken in years a little,—such a brow 50
 His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint
 On either side the formidable nose
 Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.
 Had he to do with A's surprising fate?
 When altogether old B. disappeared 55
 And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,
 His letter to the King, that did it all?
 What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
 Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
 And shifts his ministry some once a month; 60
 Our city gets new governors at whiles,—
 But never word or sign, that I could hear,
 Notified to this man about the streets
 The King's approval of those letters conned
 The last thing duly at the dead of night. 65

III

Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,
 Exhorting when none heard—'Beseech me not!
 Too far above my people,—beneath me!
 I set the watch,—how should the people know?
 Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!' 70
 Was some such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
 That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
 Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
 You found he ate his supper in a room 75
 Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
 And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
 Poor man, he lived another kind of life
 In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge,
 Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise! 80
 The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
 Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
 Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
 (Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
 And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
 Or treat of radishes in April. Nine, 86
 Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
 Would point him out to me a dozen times;
 'St—St,' he'd whisper, 'the Corregidor!' 90
 I had been used to think that personage
 Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
 And feathers like a forest in his hat,
 Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
 Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
 And memorized the miracle in vogue! 96
 He had a great observance from us boys;
 We were in error; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
 To have just looked, when this man came to die, 100
 And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides
 And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
 With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
 Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
 Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
 Doing the King's work all the dim day long, 106
 In his old coat and up to knees in mud,
 Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
 And, now the day was won, relieved at once!
 No further show or need for that old coat, 110
 You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while
 How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!
 A second, and the angels alter that.
 Well, I could never write a verse,—could you?
 Let's to the Prado and make the most of time. 115

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

Men and Women, 1855

I

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
 Since now at length my fate I know,
 Since nothing all my love avails,
 Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be— 5
 My whole heart rises up to bless
 Your name in pride and thankfulness!
 Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
 Only a memory of the same,
 —And this beside, if you will not blame, 10
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II3

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
 Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
 When pity would be softening through,
 Fixed me a breathing-while or two 15
 With life or death in the balance: right!
 The blood replenished me again;
 My last thought was at least not vain:
 I and my mistress, side by side
 Shall be together, breathe and ride, 20
 So, one day more am I deified.
 Who knows but the world may end to-night?

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
 All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
 By many benedictions—sun's 25
 And moon's and evening-star's at once—
 And so, you, looking and loving best,
 Conscious grew, your passion drew
 Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
 Down on you, near and yet more near, 30
 Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
 Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
 Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV

Then we began to ride. My soul
 Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll 35
 Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
 Past hopes already lay behind
 What need to strive with a life awry?
 Had I said that, had I done this,
 So might I gain, so might I miss. 40

II4

Might she have loved me? just as well
 She might have hated, who can tell!
 Where had I been now if the worst befell?
 And here we are riding, she and I.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds? 45
 Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
 We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
 Saw other regions, cities new,
 As the world rushed by on either side.
 I thought,—All labour, yet no less 50
 Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
 Look at the end of work, contrast
 The petty done, the undone vast,
 This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
 I hoped she would love me; here we ride. 55

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?
 What heart alike conceived and dared?
 What act proved all its thought had been?
 What will but felt the fleshly screen?
 We ride and I see her bosom heave. 60
 There's many a crown for who can reach.
 Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
 The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
 A soldier's doing! what atones?
 They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones. 65
 My riding is better, by their leave.

VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
 Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
 What we felt only; you expressed
 You hold things beautiful the best, 70

And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
 'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
 Have you yourself what's best for men?
 Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
 Nearer one whit your own sublime 75
 Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
 Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
 A score of years to Art, her slave,
 And that's your Venus, whence we turn 80
 To yonder girl that fords the burn!
 You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
 What, man of music, you grown grey
 With notes and nothing else to say,
 Is this your sole praise from a friend, 85
 'Greatly his opera's strains intend,
 But in music we know how fashions end!'

I gave my youth, but we ride, in fine.

IX

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
 Proposed bliss here should sublimate 90
 My being—had I signed the bond—
 Still one must lead some life beyond,
 Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
 This foot once planted on the goal,
 This glory-garland round my soul, 95
 Could I descry such? Try and test!
 I sink back shuddering from the quest.
 Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
 Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long! 100
 What if heaven be that, fair and strong
 At life's best, with our eyes upturned
 Whither life's flower is first discerned,
 We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
 What if we still ride on, we two 105
 With life for ever old yet new,
 Changed not in kind but in degree,
 The instant made eternity,—
 And heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, for ever ride? 110

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

Men and Women, 1855

I

It was roses, roses, all the way,
 With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
 The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
 The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
 A year ago on this very day. 5

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
 The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
 Had I said, 'Good folk, mere noise repels—
 But give me your sun from yonder skies!'
 They had answered, 'And afterward, what else?'

III

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun 11
 To give it my loving friends to keep!

II7

Nought man could do, have I left undone:

And you see my harvest, what I reap

This very day, now a year is run.

15

IV

There's nobody on the house-tops now—

Just a palsied few at the windows set;

For the best of the sight is, all allow,

At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,

By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

20

V

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,

A rope cuts both my wrists behind;

And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,

For they fling, whoever has a mind,

Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

25

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!

In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.

'Paid by the world, what dost thou owe

Me?'—God might question; now instead,

'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.

30

From BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

Men and Women, 1855

AND now what are we? unbelievers both,

Calm and complete, determinately fixed

To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?

You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!

In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,

5

As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,

Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's

The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,

Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
 Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch, 10
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
 A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
 And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
 As old and new at once as nature's self,
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul, 15
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
 The grand Perhaps!

MEMORABILIA

Men and Women, 1855

I

Ан, did you once see Shelley plain,
 And did he stop and speak to you,
 And did you speak to him again?
 How strange it seems and new!

II

But you were living before that, 5
 And also you are living after;
 And the memory I started at—
 My starting moves your laughter.

III

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
 And a certain use in the world no doubt, 10
 Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
 'Mid the blank miles round about:

IV

For there I picked up on the heather
 And there I put inside my breast
 A moulted feather, an eagle-feather! 15
 Well, I forget the rest.

ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED 'THE FAULTLESS PAINTER')

Men and Women, 1855

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,
 No, my Lucrezia, bear with me for once:
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear, 5
 Treat his own subject after his own way,
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
 Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love! 10
 I often am much wearier than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
 Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole, 15
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this! 20
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
 Don't count the time lost, neither, you must serve
 For each of the five pictures we require:
 It saves a model. So! keep looking so— 25
 My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
 —How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
 Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—
 My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
 Which everybody looks on and calls his, 30

And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
 While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less.
 You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
 There's what we painters call our harmony!
 A common greyness silvers everything,— 35
 All in a twilight, you and I alike
 —You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole. 40
 There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
 That length of convent-wall across the way
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
 The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
 And autumn grows, autumn in everything. 45
 Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
 As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was born to be and do,
 A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are! 51
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
 This chamber for example—turn your head—
 All that's behind us! You don't understand
 Nor care to understand about my art, 55
 But you can hear at least when people speak:
 And that cartoon, the second from the door
 —It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—
 Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.
 I can do with my pencil what I know, 60
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
 Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,

Who listened to the Legate's talk last week, 65
 And just as much they used to say in France.
 At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
 I do what many dream of, all their lives,
 —Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do, 70
 And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
 Who strive—you don't know how the others strive
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,— 75
 Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
 (I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
 There burns a truer light of God in them, 79
 In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
 This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
 Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
 Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
 Enter and take their place there sure enough, 85
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
 The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
 I, painting from myself and to myself, 90
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
 Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that? 95
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
 Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey

Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
 I know both what I want and what might gain, 100
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
 'Had I been two, another and myself,
 Our head would have o'erlooked the world!' No doubt,
 Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
 The Urbinate who died five years ago. 105
 ('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
 Above and through his art—for it gives way; 110
 That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
 Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
 He means right—that, a child may understand.
 Still, what an arm! and I could alter it: 115
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
 Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
 Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think— 120
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.
 But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare— 125
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
 'God and the glory! never care for gain.
 The present by the future, what is that?
 Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo! 130
 Rafael is waiting' up to God, all three!
 I might have done it for you. So it seems:

Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you? 135
 What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive.
 Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end, 140
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
 That I am something underrated here,
 Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day, 145
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
 The best is when they pass and look aside;
 But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
 Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau! 150
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
 In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile, 155
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls 160
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
 This in the background, waiting on my work,
 To crown the issue with a last reward!
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days? 165
 And had you not grown restless . . . but I know—

'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end in any other way? 171
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.
 The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine! 176
 'Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
 The Roman's is the better when you pray,
 But still the other's Virgin was his wife—'
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge 180
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
 Said one day Agnolo, his very self, 184
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)
 'Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
 Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how, 190
 Who, were he set to plan and execute
 As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!'
 To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see, 195
 Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 (What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
 Do you forget already words like those?) 200

If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
 Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
 If you would sit thus by me every night 205
 I should work better, do you comprehend?
 I mean that I should earn more, give you more.
 See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
 Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
 The cue-owls speak the name we call them by. 210
 Come from the window, love,—come in, at last,
 Inside the melancholy little house
 We built to be so gay with. God is just.
 King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out, 215
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick
 Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
 That gold of his I did cement them with!
 Let us but love each other. Must you go?
 That Cousin here again? he waits outside? 220
 Must see you—you, and not with me? Those loans?
 More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
 Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
 While hand and eye and something of a heart
 Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
 I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit 226
 The grey remainder of the evening out,
 Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
 How I could paint, were I but back in France,
 One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face, 230
 Not your's this time! I want you at my side
 To hear them—that is, Michel Agnolo—
 Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
 Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.

I take the subjects for his corridor, 235
 Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
 And throw him in another thing or two
 If he demurs, the whole should prove enough
 To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
 What's better and what's all I care about, 240
 Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
 Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
 The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
 I regret little, I would change still less 245
 Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
 The very wrong to Francis!—it is true
 I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
 And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
 My father and my mother died of want. 250
 Well, had I riches of my own? you see
 How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
 They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
 And I have laboured somewhat in my time
 And not been paid profusely Some good son 255
 Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!
 No doubt, there's something strikes a balance Yes,
 You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
 This must suffice me here. What would one have?
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem, 261
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover—the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So—still they overcome 265
 Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

IN A YEAR

Men and Women, 1855

I

NEVER any more,
 While I live,
 Need I hope to see his face
 As before.
 Once his love grown chill, 5
 Mine may strive:
 Bitterly we re-embrace,
 Single still.

II

Was it something said,
 Something done, 10
 Vexed him? was it touch of hand,
 Turn of head?
 Strange! that very way
 Love begun:
 I as little understand 15
 Love's decay.

III

When I sewed or drew,
 I recall
 How he looked as if I sung,
 —Sweetly too. 20
 If I spoke a word,
 First of all
 Up his cheek the colour sprun ,
 Then he heard.

IV

Sitting by my side, 25
 At my feet,
 So he breathed but air I breathed,
 Satisfied!
 I, too, at love's brim
 Touched the sweet: 30
 I would die if death bequeathed
 Sweet to him.

V

'Speak, I love thee best!'
 He exclaimed:
 'Let thy love my own foretell!' 35
 I confessed:
 'Clasp my heart on thine
 Now unblamed,
 Since upon thy soul as well
 Hangeth mine!' 40

VI

Was it wrong to own,
 Being truth?
 Why should all the giving prove
 His alone?
 I had wealth and ease, 45
 Beauty, youth:
 Since my lover gave me love,
 I gave these.

VII

That was all I meant,
 —To be just, 50
 And the passion I had raised,
 To content.

129

Since he chose to change
 Gold for dust,
 If I gave him what he praised 55
 Was it strange?

VIII

Would he loved me yet,
 On and on,
 While I found some way undreamed
 —Paid my debt! 60
 Gave more life and more,
 Till, all gone,
 He should smile 'She never seemed
 Mine before.

IX

'What, she felt the while, 65
 Must I think?
 Love's so different with us men!'
 He should smile:
 'Dying for my sake—
 White and pink! 70
 Can't we touch these bubbles then
 But they break?'

X

Dear, the pang is brief,
 Do thy part,
 Have thy pleasure! How perplexed 75
 Grows belief!
 Well, this cold clay clod
 Was man's heart,
 Crumble it, and what comes next?
 Is it God? 80

'DE GUSTIBUS—'

Men and Women, 1855

I

YOUR ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
 (If our loves remain)
 In an English lane,
 By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
 Hark, those two in the hazel coppice— 5
 A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
 Making love, say,—
 The happier they!
 Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
 And let them pass, as they will too soon, 10
 With the bean-flowers' boon,
 And the blackbird's tune,
 And May, and June!

II

What I love best in all the world
 Is a castle, precipice-encurled, 15
 In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.
 Or look for me, old fellow of mine,
 (If I get my head from out the mouth
 O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
 And come again to the land of lands)— 20
 In a sea-side house to the farther South,
 Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
 And one sharp tree—'tis a cypress—stands,
 By the many hundred years red-rusted,
 Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted, 25
 My sentinel to guard the sands
 To the water's edge. For, what expands
 Before the house, but the great opaque
 Blue breadth of sea without a break?

While, in the house, for ever crumbles 30
 Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
 From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
 A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
 Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
 And says there's news to-day—the king 35
 Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
 Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling:
 —She hopes they have not caught the felons.
 Italy, my Italy!
 Queen Mary's saying serves for me— 40
 (When fortune's malice
 Lost her—Calais)—
 Open my heart and you will see
 Graved inside of it, 'Italy.'
 Such lovers old are I and she: 45
 So it always was, so shall ever be!

POPULARITY

Men and Women, 1855

I

STAND still, true poet that you are!
 I know you; let me try and draw you.
 Some night you'll fail us: when afar
 You rise, remember one man saw you,
 Knew you, and named a star! 5

II

My star, God's glow-worm! Why extend
 That loving hand of his which leads you,
 Yet locks you safe from end to end
 Of this dark world, unless he needs you,
 Just saves your light to spend? 10

III

His clenched hand shall unclothe at last,
 I know, and let out all the beauty:
 My poet holds the future fast,
 Accepts the coming ages' duty,
 Their present for this past.

15

IV

That day, the earth's feast-master's brow
 Shall clear, to God the chalice raising;
 'Others give best at first, but thou
 Forever set'st our table praising,
 Keep'st the good wine till now!'

20

V

Meantime, I'll draw you as you stand,
 With few or none to watch and wonder:
 I'll say—a fisher, on the sand
 By Tyre the old, with ocean-plunder,
 A netful, brought to land.

25

VI

Who has not heard how Tyrian shells
 Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes
 Whereof one drop worked miracles,
 And coloured like Astarte's eyes
 Raw silk the merchant sells?

30

VII

And each bystander of them all
 Could criticize, and quote tradition
 How depths of blue sublimed some pall
 —To get which, pricked a king's ambition;
 Worth sceptre, crown and ball.

35

VIII

Yet there's the dye, in that rough mesh,
 The sea has only just o'erwhispered!
 Live whelks, each lip's beard dripping fresh,
 As if they still the water's lisp heard
 Through foam the rock-weeds thresh. 40

IX

Enough to furnish Solomon
 Such hangings for his cedar-house,
 That, when gold-robed he took the throne
 In that abyss of blue, the Spouse
 Might swear his presence shone 45

X

Most like the centre-spike of gold
 Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,
 What time, with ardours manifold,
 The bee goes singing to her groom,
 Drunken and overbold. 50

XI

Mere conchs! not fit for warp or woof!
 Till cunning come to pound and squeeze
 And clarify,—refine to proof
 The liquor filtered by degrees,
 While the world stands aloof. 55

XII

And there's the extract, flasked and fine,
 And priced and saleable at last!
 And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine
 To paint the future from the past,
 Put blue into their line. 60

XIII

Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats:
 Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup:

Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—
 Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
 What porridge had John Keats? 65

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

Men and Women, 1855

I

I WONDER do you feel to-day
 As I have felt since, hand in hand,
 We sat down on the grass, to stray
 In spirit better through the land,
 This morn of Rome and May? 5

II

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
 Has tantalized me many times,
 (Like turns of thread the spiders throw
 Mocking across our path) for rhymes
 To catch at and let go. 10

III

Help me to hold it! First it left
 The yellowing fennel, run to seed
 There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
 Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
 Took up the floating weft, 15

IV

Where one small orange cup amassed
 Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
 Among the honey-meal: and last,
 Everywhere on the grassy slope
 I traced it. Hold it fast! 20

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
 Of feathery grasses everywhere!
 Silence and passion, joy and peace,
 An everlasting wash of air—
 Rome's ghost since her decease. 25

VI

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
 Such miracles performed in play,
 Such primal naked forms of flowers,
 Such letting nature have her way
 While heaven looks from its towers! 30

VII

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
 Let us be unashamed of soul,
 As earth lies bare to heaven above!
 How is it under our control
 To love or not to love? 35

VIII

I would that you were all to me,
 You that are just so much, no more.
 Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
 Where does the fault lie? What the core
 O' the wound, since wound must be? 40

IX

I would I could adopt your will,
 See with your eyes, and set my heart
 Beating by yours, and drink my fill
 At your soul's springs,—your part my part
 In life, for good and ill. 45

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
 Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
 Catch your soul's warmth,—I pluck the rose
 And love it more than tongue can speak—
 Then the good minute goes. 50

XI

Already how am I so far
 Out of that minute? Must I go
 Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
 Onward, whenever light winds blow,
 Fixed by no friendly star? 55

XII

Just when I seemed about to learn!
 Where is the thread now? Off again!
 The old trick! Only I discern—
 Infinite passion, and the pain
 Of finite hearts that yearn. 60

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN EUROPE

Men and Women, 1855

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,
 Singing together.
 Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
 Each in its tether
 Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain, 5
 Cared-for till cock-crow.
 Look out if yonder be not day again
 Rimming the rock-row!
 That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
 Rarer, intenser, 10

Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
 Chafes in the censer.
 Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
 Seek we sepulture
 On a tall mountain, citied to the top, 15
 Crowded with culture!
 All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
 Clouds overcome it,
 No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
 Circling its summit. 20
 Thither our path lies, wind we up the heights:
 Wait ye the warning?
 Our low life was the level's and the night's;
 He's for the morning.
 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head, 25
 'Ware the beholders!
 This is our master, famous calm and dead,
 Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
 Safe from the weather! 30
 He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
 Singing together,
 He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo!
 Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
 Winter would follow? 36
 Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
 Cramped and diminished,
 Moaned he, 'New measures, other feet anon!
 My dance is finished'? 40
 No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
 Make for the city!)

He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity;
 Left play for work, and grappled with the world 45
 Bent on escaping:
 'What's in the scroll,' quoth he, 'thou keepest furled?
 Show me their shaping,
 Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
 Give!'—So, he gowned him, 50
 Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
 Learned, we found him.
 Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
 Accents uncertain:
 'Time to taste life,' another would have said, 55
 'Up with the curtain!'
 This man said rather, 'Actual life comes next?
 Patience a moment!
 Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
 Still there's the comment. 60
 Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
 Painful or easy!
 Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
 Ay, nor feel queasy.'
 Oh, such a life as he resolved to live, 65
 When he had learned it,
 When he had gathered all books had to give!
 Sooner, he spurned it.
 Image the whole, then execute the parts—
 Fancy the fabric 70
 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
 Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
 Gaping before us.)

Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace (Hearten our chorus!)	75
That before living he'd learn how to live— No end to learning:	
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive Use for our earning.	80
Others mistrust and say, 'But time escapes: Live now or never!'	
He said, 'What's time? leave Now for dogs and apes! Man has Forever.'	
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head: <i>Calculus</i> racked him:	85
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead: <i>Tussis</i> attacked him.	
'Now, master, take a little rest!'—not he! (Caution redoubled,	90
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!) Not a whit troubled	
Back to his studies, fresher than at first, Fierce as a dragon	
He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst) Sucked at the fiagon.	95
Oh, if we draw a circle premature, Heedless of far gain,	
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure Bad is our bargain!	100
Was it not great? did not he throw on God, (He loves the burthen)—	
God's task to make the heavenly period Perfect the earthen?	
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear Just what it all meant?	105
He would not discount life, as fools do here, Paid by instalment.	

He ventured neck or nothing—heaven's success
 Found, or earth's failure: 110
 'Wilt thou trust death or not?' He answered 'Yes;
 Hence with life's pale lure!'

That low man seeks a little thing to do,
 Sees it and does it:
 This high man, with a great thing to pursue, 115
 Dies ere he knows it.

That low man goes on adding one to one,
 His hundred's soon hit:
 This high man, aiming at a million,
 Misses an unit 120

That, has the world here—should he need the next,
 Let the world mind him!
 This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
 Seeking shall find him.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife, 125
 Ground he at grammar;
 Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
 While he could stammer

He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—
 Properly based *Oun*— 130
 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
 Dead from the waist down.

Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
 Hail to your purlieus,
 All ye highfliers of the feathered race, 135
 Swallows and curlews!

Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
 Live, for they can, there:
 This man decided not to Live but Know—
 Bury this man there? 140

Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
 Lightnings are loosened.

Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
 Peace let the dew send!
 Lofty designs must close in like effects: 145
 Loftily lying,
 Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
 Living and dying.

ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.

Men and Women, 1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
 Naming me the fifty poems finished!
 Take them, Love, the book and me together:
 Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets, 5
 Made and wrote them in a certain volume
 Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
 Else he only used to draw Madonnas:
 These, the world might view—but one, the volume.
 Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
 Did she live and love it all her life-time? 11
 Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
 Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
 Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
 Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving— 15
 Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
 Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume,
 (Taken to his beating bosom by it)

Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael, 20
 Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas—
 Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
 Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
 Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre—
 Seen by us and all the world in circle. 25

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
 Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
 Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
 Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
 Cried, and the world cried too, 'Ours, the treasure!'
 Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished. 31

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
 Whom to please? You whisper 'Beatrice.'
 While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
 (Peradventure with a pen corroded 35
 Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
 When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
 Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
 Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
 Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle, 40
 Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
 Dante, who loved well because he hated,
 Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
 Dante standing, studying his angel,—
 In there broke the folk of his Inferno. 45
 Says he—'Certain people of importance'
 (Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
 'Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet.'
 Says the poet—'Then I stopped my painting.'

VI

You and I would rather see that angel, 50
 Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
 Would we not?—than read a fresh *Inferno*.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.
 While he mused on love and Beatrice,
 While he softened o'er his outlined angel, 55
 In they broke, those 'people of importance.'
 We and Bice bear the loss for ever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
 This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
 Once, and only once, and for one only, 60
 (Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
 Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
 Using nature that's an art to others,
 Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
 Ay, of all the artists living, loving, 65
 None but would forego his proper dowry,—
 Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,—
 Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
 Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
 Once, and only once, and for one only, 70
 So to be the man and leave the artist,
 Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
 He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
 Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him, 75
 Even he, the minute makes immortal,
 Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
 Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.

While he smites, how can he but remember,
 So he smote before, in such a peril, 80
 When they stood and mocked—'Shall smiting help us?'
 When they drank and sneered—'A stroke is easy!'
 When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
 Throwing him for thanks—'But drought was pleasant.'
 Thus old memories mar the actual triumph; 85
 Thus the doing savours of disrelish,
 Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;
 O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
 Carelessness or consciousness—the gesture.
 For he bears an ancient wrong about him, 90
 Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
 Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude—
 'How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?'
 Guesses what is like to prove the sequel—
 'Egypt's flesh-pots—nay, the drought was better.'

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant! 96
 Theirs, the Sinai-forehead's cloven brilliance,
 Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
 Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands, 100
 (Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
 Were she but the Aethiopian bondslave.)
 He would envy yon dumb patient camel,
 Keeping a reserve of scanty water
 Meant to save his own life in the desert; 105
 Ready in the desert to deliver
 (Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
 Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
 Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues, 110
 Make you music that should all-express me;
 So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
 This of verse alone, one life allows me;
 Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
 Other heights in other lives, God willing: 115
 All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us—
 Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
 Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
 Lines I write the first time and the last time. 120
 He who works in fresco, steals a hair-brush,
 Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
 Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
 Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
 Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets. 125
 He who blows thro' bronze, may breathe thro' silver
 Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
 He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
 Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy, 130
 Enter each and all, and use their service,
 Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem.
 Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
 Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
 I am mine and yours—the rest be all men's, 135
 Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
 Let me speak this once in my true person,
 Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,

Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
 Pray you, look on these my men and women, 140
 Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
 Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
 Poor the speech, be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
 Here in London, yonder late in Florence, 145
 Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
 Curving on a sky imbrued with colour,
 Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
 Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
 Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato, 150
 Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
 Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
 Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
 Hard to greet, she traverses the houseroofs,
 Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver, 155
 Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
 Nay, for if that moon could love a mortal,
 Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy,)
 All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos) 160
 She would turn a new side to her mortal,
 Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman—
 Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
 Blind to Galileo on his turret,
 Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats—him, even! 165
 Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal—
 When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
 Opens out anew for worse or better!
 Proves she like some portent of an iceberg

Swimming full upon the ship it founders, 170
 Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
 Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
 Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
 Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
 Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest, 175
 Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
 Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
 Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
 When they ate and drank and saw God also! 179

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever shall know.
 Only this is sure—the sight were other,
 Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
 Dying now impoverished here in London.
 God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
 Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with, 185
 One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
 This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
 Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
 Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
 There, in turn I stand with them and praise you— 191
 Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
 But the best is when I glide from out them,
 Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
 Come out on the other side, the novel 195
 Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
 Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
 Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,

Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
 Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom!

200

From JAMES LEE'S WIFE

Dramatis Personae, 1864

From IN THE DOORWAY

I

THE swallow has set her six young on the rail,
 And looks sea-ward:
 The water's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
 To the leeward,— 4
 On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
 'Good fortune departs, and disaster's behind,'—
 Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail!

II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
 Her five fingers,
 Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world 10
 Where there lingers
 No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake:
 How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake!
 My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

From AMONG THE ROCKS

OH, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
 This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
 To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
 For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
 Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
 The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet. 6

RABBI BEN EZRA

Dramatis Personae, 1864

I

GROW old along with me!
 The best is yet to be,
 The last of life, for which the first was made:
 Our times are in His hand
 Who saith 'A whole I planned, 5
 Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!'

II

Not that, amassing flowers,
 Youth sighed 'Which rose make ours,
 Which lily leave and then as best recall?'
 Not that, admiring stars, 10
 It yearned 'Nor Jove, nor Mars;
 Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them
 all!'

III

Not for such hopes and fears
 Annulling youth's brief years,
 Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark! 15
 Rather I prize the doubt
 Low kinds exist without,
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
 Were man but formed to feed 20
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
 Such feasting ended, then
 As sure an end to men;
 Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed
 beast?

V

Rejoice we are allied 25
 To That which doth provide
 And not partake, effect and not receive!
 A spark disturbs our clod ;
 Nearer we hold of God
 Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

VI

Then, welcome each rebuff 31
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
 Be our joys three-parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain ; 35
 Learn, nor account the pang ; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence,—a paradox
 Which comforts while it mocks,—
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
 What I aspired to be, 40
 And was not, comforts me:
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

What is he but a brute
 Whose flesh has soul to suit,
 Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play ? 45
 To man, propose this test—
 Thy body at its best,
 How far can that project thy soul on its lone way ?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use:
 I own the Past profuse 50

Of power each side, perfection every turn:
 Eyes, ears took in their dole,
 Brain treasured up the whole;
 Should not the heart beat once 'How good to live and learn?'

X

Not once beat 'Praise be Thine! 55
 I see the whole design,
 I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
 Perfect I call Thy plan:
 Thanks that I was a man!
 Maker, remake, complete,—I trust what Thou shalt do!

XI

For pleasant is this flesh; 61
 Our soul, in its rose-mesh
 Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;
 Would we some prize might hold
 To match those manifold 65
 Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

XII

Let us not always say
 'Spite of this flesh to-day
 I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!' 70
 As the bird wings and sings,
 Let us cry 'All good things
 Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!'

XIII

Therefore I summon age
 To grant youth's heritage,
 Life's struggle having so far reached its term: 75
 Thence shall I pass, approved
 A man, for aye removed
 From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon
 Take rest, ere I be gone 80
 Once more on my adventure brave and new:
 Fearless and unperplexed,
 When I wage battle next,
 What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try 85
 My gain or loss thereby;
 Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
 And I shall weigh the same,
 Give life its praise or blame
 Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

For note, when evening shuts, 91
 A certain moment cuts
 The deed off, calls the glory from the grey:
 A whisper from the west
 Shoots—'Add this to the rest, 95
 Take it and try its worth here dies another day.'

XVII

So, still within this life,
 Though lifted o'er its strife,
 Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
 'This rage was right i' the main, 100
 That acquiescence vain:
 The Future I may face now I have proved the Past.'

XVIII

For more is not reserved
 To man, with soul just nerved

To act to-morrow what he learns to-day: 105
 Here, work enough to watch
 The Master work, and catch
 Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth
 Should strive, through acts uncouth, 110
 Toward making, than repose on aught found made;
 So, better, age, exempt
 From strife, should know, than tempt
 Further. Thou waitedst age; wait death nor be afraid!

XX

Enough now, if the Right 115
 And Good and Infinite
 Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,
 With knowledge absolute,
 Subject to no dispute
 From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

Be there, for once and all, 121
 Severed great minds from small,
 Announced to each his station in the Past!
 Was I, the world arraigned,
 Were they, my soul disdained, 125
 Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate?
 Ten men love what I hate,
 Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
 Ten, who in ears and eyes 130
 Match me: we all surmise,
 They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass
 Called 'work,' must sentence pass,
 Things done, that took the eye and had the price; 135
 O'er which, from level stand,
 The low world laid its hand,
 Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb
 And finger failed to plumb, 140
 So passed in making up the main account;
 All instincts immature,
 All purposes unsure,
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed 145
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
 All I could never be,
 All, men ignored in me,
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Ay, note that Potter's wheel, 151
 That metaphor! and feel
 Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
 Thou, to whom fools propound,
 When the wine makes its round,
 'Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!'

XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all, 157
 Lasts ever, past recall;

Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
 What entered into thee, 160
That was, is, and shall be:
 Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee mid this dance
 Of plastic circumstance,
 This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest: 165
 Machinery just meant
 To give thy soul its bent,
 Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves
 Which ran the laughing loves 170
 Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
 What though, about thy rim,
 Scull-things in order grum
 Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look not thou down but up! 175
 To uses of a cup,
 The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
 The new wine's foaming flow,
 The Master's lips a-glow!
 Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with
 earth's wheel? 180

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
 Thee, God, who moulded men;
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
 Did I,—to the wheel of life
 With shapes and colours rife, 185
 Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

So, take and use Thy work:
 Amend what flaws may lurk,
 What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
 My times be in Thy hand! 190
 Perfect the cup as planned!
 Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

From A DEATH IN THE DESERT

Dramatis Personæ, 1864

[SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene:
 It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,
 Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek
 And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu*.
 Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest, 5
 Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,
 Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,
 From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace:
Mu and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.
 I may not write it, but I make a cross 10
 To show I wait His coming, with the rest,
 And leave off here beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, 'If one should wet his lips with wine,
 And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,
 Or else the lappet of a linen robe, 15
 Into the water-vessel, lay it right,
 And cool his forehead just above the eyes,
 The while a brother, kneeling either side,
 Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—
 He is not so far gone but he might speak.' 20

25

30

35

50

If any dear one call him, touch his face—
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept: 55
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,
Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead 60
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,
And spoke, as 'twere his mouth proclaiming first,
'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once, 65
And sat up of himself, and looked at us;
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word:
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
As signal we were safe, from time to time. 70

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS;

OR,

NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND

'THOU THOUGHTEST THAT I WAS ALTOGETHER SUCH A ONE
AS THYSELF'

Dramatis Personae, 1864

['WILL sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course, 5

Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:
 And while above his head a pompion-plant,
 Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
 Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
 And now a flower drops with a bee inside, 10
 And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—
 He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
 And recross till they weave a spider-web
 (Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
 And talks to his own self, howe'er he please, 15
 Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
 Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,
 Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
 When talk is safer than in winter-time.
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep 20
 In confidence he drudges at their task,
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech]

 Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!
 'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon. 25
 'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
 But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
 Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
 Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
 And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same. 30

 'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
 He hated that He cannot change His cold,
 Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
 That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
 And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine 35
 O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
 A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
 Only, she ever sickened, found repulse

At the other kind of water, not her life,
 (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun) 40
 Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe
 And in her old bounds buried her despair,
 Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle, 44
 Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
 Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech;
 Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
 That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
 He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
 By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue 50
 That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
 And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
 But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves
 That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
 About their hole—He made all these and more, 55
 Made all we see, and us, in spite how else?
 He could not, Himself, make a second self
 To be His mate, as well have made Himself:
 He would not make what He mislikes or slights,
 An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains: 60
 But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
 Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—
 Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
 Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
 Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it. 65
 Because, so brave, so better though they be,
 It nothing skills if He begin to plague.
 Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,
 Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,
 Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,— 70
 Then, when froth rises bladdery, drunk up all,

Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain;
 Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,
 And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.
 Put case, unable to be what I wish, 75
 I yet could make a live bird out of clay:
 Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
 Able to fly?—for, there, see, he hath wings,
 And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
 And there, a sting to do his foes offence, 80
 There, and I will that he begin to live,
 Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,
 Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.
 In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay, 85
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh;
 And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else 90
 Not take my fancy: I might hear his cry,
 And give the mankin three sound legs for one,
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme, 95
 Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,
 Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,
 Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.
 'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs 100
 That march now from the mountain to the sea;
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots

Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off ; 105
 'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
 And two worins he whose nippers end in red ;
 As it likes me each time, I do. so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed, 110
 But rougher than His handiwork, be sure!
 Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
 And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
 Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
 That they, unless through Him, do nought at all, 115
 And must submit ' what other use in things ?
 'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint
 That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay
 When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue:
 Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay 120
 Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt:
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth
 'I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
 I make the cry my maker cannot make
 With his great round mouth ; he must blow through mine!'
 Would not I smash it with my foot ? So He. 126

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease ?
 Aha, that is a question! Ask, for that,
 What knows,—the something over Setebos
 That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought, 130
 Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
 There may be something quiet o'er His head,
 Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,
 Since both derive from weakness in some way.
 I joy because the quails come ; would not joy 135
 Could I bring quails here when I have a mind:
 This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.

'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,
 But never spends much thought nor care that way.
 It may look up, work up,—the worse for those 140
 It works on! 'Careth but for Setebos
 The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,
 Who, making Himself feared through what He does,
 Looks up, first, and perceives He cannot soar
 To what is quiet and hath happy life; 145
 Next looks down here, and out of very spite
 Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,
 These good things to match those as hips do grapes.
 'Tis solace making baubles, ay, and sport.
 Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books 150
 Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:
 Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,
 Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;
 Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;
 Wearcth at whiles for an enchanter's robe 155
 The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;
 And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,
 A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,
 Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,
 And saith she is Miranda and my wife: 160
 'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane
 He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge;
 Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge 165
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
 A bitter heart, that bides its time and bites.
 'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
 Taketh his mirth with make-believes' so He.

 His dam held that the Quiet made all things 170

Which Setebos vexed only: 'holds not so.
 Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.
 Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
 Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
 Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow, 175
 Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
 Like an orc's armour? Ay,—so spoil His sport!
 He is the One now. only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.
 Ay, himself loves what does him good, but why? 180
 'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast
 Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,
 But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate
 Or love, just as it liked him He hath eyes.
 Also it pleaseth Setebos to work, 185
 Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,
 By no means for the love of what is worked.
 'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world
 When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,
 And he wants little, hungers, aches not much, 190
 Than trying what to do with wit and strength.
 'Falls to make something. 'piled yon pile of turfs,
 And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,
 And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,
 And set up endwise certain spikes of tree, 195
 And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,
 Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.
 No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake,
 'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof! 200
 One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.
 He hath a spite against me, that I know,
 Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why?

So it is, all the same, as well I find.
 'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm 205
 With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
 Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,
 Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
 Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
 And licked the whole labour flat: so much for spite.
 'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies) 211
 Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:
 Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!
 'Dug up a newt He may have envied once
 And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone. 215
 Please Him and hinder this?—What Prosper does?
 Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!
 There is the sport: discover how or die!
 All need not die, for of the things o' the isle
 Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees; 220
 Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most
 When . . . when . . . well, never try the same way twice!
 Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
 You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
 Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself: 225
 'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears
 But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,
 And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence:
 'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,
 Curls up into a ball, pretending death 230
 For fright at my approach: the two ways please.
 But what would move my choler more than this,
 That either creature counted on its life
 To-morrow and next day and all days to come,
 Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart, 235
 'Because he did so yesterday with me,
 And otherwise with such another brute,

So must he do henceforth and always '—Ay?
 'Would teach the reasoning couple what 'must' means!
 'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord? So He. 240
 'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
 And we shall have to live in fear of Him
 So long as He lives, keeps His strength no change,
 If He have done His best, make no new world
 To please Him more, so leave off watching this,— 245
 If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
 Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it
 As grubs grow butterflies else, here are we,
 And there is He, and nowhere help at all.
 'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop. 250
 His dam held different, that after death
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends:
 Idly! He doth His worst in this our life,
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end. 255
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
 Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,
 Bask on the pompion-bell above kills both
 'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball 260
 On head and tail as if to save their lives:
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.
 Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose
 This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,
 And always, above all else, envies Him. 265
 Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now:
 Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here, 269
 O'erheard this speech, and asked 'What chucklest at?'

'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,
 Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,
 Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,
 Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste:
 While myself lit a fire, and made a song 275
 And sung it, '*What I hate, be consecrate
 To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate
 For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?*'
 Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,
 Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime, 280
 That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
 And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
 Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

[What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!
 Crickets stop hissing, not a bird—or, yes, 285
 There scuds His raven that has told Him all!
 It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind
 Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
 And fast invading fires begin! White blaze—
 A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there,
 His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him! 291
 Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
 'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
 Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
 One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!'] 295

CONFESSIONS

Dramatis Personae, 1864

I

WHAT is he buzzing in my ears?
 'Now that I come to die,
 Do I view the world as a vale of tears?'
 Ah, reverend sir, not I!

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again 5
 Where the physic bottles stand
 On the table's edge,—is a suburb lane,
 With a wall to my bedside hand.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
 From a house you could descry 10
 O'er the garden-wall . is the curtain blue
 Or green to a healthy eye?

IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
 Blue above lane and wall;
 And that farthest bottle labelled 'Ether' 15
 Is the house o'er-topping all.

V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
 There watched for me, one June,
 A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
 My poor mind's out of tune. 20

VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
 Close by the side, to dodge
 Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
 They styled their house 'The Lodge'.

VII

What right had a lounge up their lane? 25
 But, by creeping very close,
 With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
 And stretch themselves to Oes.

VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,
 As she left the attic, there, 30
 By the rim of the bottle labelled 'Ether',
 And stole from stair to stair,

IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
 We loved, sir—used to meet:
 How sad and bad and mad it was— 35
 But then, how it was sweet!

PROSPICE

Dramatis Personae, 1864

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
 The mist in my face,
 When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
 I am nearing the place,
 The power of the night, the press of the storm, 5
 The post of the foe;
 Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
 Yet the strong man must go:
 For the journey is done and the summit attained,
 And the barriers fall, 10
 Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
 The reward of it all.
 I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
 The best and the last!
 I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
 And bade me creep past. 16
 No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
 The heroes of old,
 Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
 Of pain, darkness and cold. 20

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
 The black minute's at end,
 And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
 Shall dwindle, shall blend, 24
 Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
 Then a light, then thy breast,
 O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
 And with God be the rest!

A FACE

Dramatis Personae, 1864

IF one could have that little head of hers
 Painted upon a background of pale gold,
 Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
 No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
 Of those two lips, which should be opening soft 5
 In the pure profile, not as when she laughs,
 For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
 Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
 Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss
 And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this. 10
 Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
 How it should waver on the pale gold ground
 Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
 I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
 Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb 15
 Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
 But these are only massed there, I should think,
 Waiting to see some wonder momentarily
 Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
 (That's the pale ground you'd see this sweet face by),
 All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
 Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink. 22

From THE RING AND THE BOOK

'O LYRIC LOVE'

1868

O LYRIC Love, half angel and half bird
 And all a wonder and a wild desire,—
 Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
 Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
 And sang a kindred soul out to his face,— 5
 Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart—
 When the first summons from the darkling earth
 Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
 And bared them of the glory—to drop down,
 To toil for man, to suffer or to die,— 10
 This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
 Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
 Never may I commence my song, my due
 To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
 Except with bent head and beseeching hand— 15
 That still, despite the distance and the dark,
 What was, again may be; some interchange
 Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
 Some benediction anciently thy smile:
 —Never conclude, but raising hand and head 20
 Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
 For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
 Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
 In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
 Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
 Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall! 26

From THE POPE'S SPEECH

FIRST of the first,
 Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
 Perfect in whiteness: stoop thou down, my child,
 Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
 Heart-sick at having all his world to blame— 5
 Let me look at thee in the flesh as erst,
 Let me enjoy the old clean linen garb,
 Not the new splendid vesture! Armed and crowned,
 Would Michael, yonder, be, nor crowned nor armed,
 The less pre-eminent angel? Everywhere 10
 I see in the world the intellect of man,
 That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
 The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
 Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
 The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower 15
 She holds up to the softened gaze of God!
 It was not given Pompilia to know much,
 Speak much, to write a book, to move mankind,
 Be memorized by who records my time.
 Yet if in purity and patience, if 20
 In faith held fast despite the plucking fiend,
 Safe like the signet stone with the new name
 That saints are known by,—if in right returned
 For wrong, most pardon for worst injury,
 If there be any virtue, any praise,— 25
 Then will this woman-child have proved—who knows?—
 Just the one prize vouchsafed unworthy me,
 Seven years a gardener of the untoward ground,
 I till,—this earth, my sweat and blood manure
 All the long day that barrenly grows dusk: 30
 At least one blossom makes me proud at eve
 Born 'mid the briers of my enclosure! Still

(Oh, here as elsewhere, nothingness of man!)
 Those be the plants, imbedded yonder South
 To mellow in the morning, those made fat 35
 By the master's eye, that yield such timid leaf,
 Uncertain bud, as product of his pains!
 While—see how this mere chance-sown cleft-nursed seed
 That sprang up by the wayside 'neath the foot
 Of the enemy, this breaks all into blaze, 40
 Spreads itself, one wide glory of desire
 To incorporate the whole great sun it loves
 From the inch-height whence it looks and longs! My flower,
 My rose, I gather for the breast of God,
 This I praise most in thee, where all I praise, 45
 That having been obedient to the end
 According to the light allotted, law
 Prescribed thy life, still tried, still standing test,—
 Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
 Submissive next to the bad husband,—nay, 50
 Tolerant of those meaner miserable
 That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain,—
 Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,
 The old to the new, promoted at one cry
 O' the trump of God to the new service, not 55
 To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
 Sublime in new impatience with the foe!
 Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
 On neck of man, tread man into the hell
 Meet for him, and obey God all the more! 60
 Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
 When it seemed only thine to keep or lose,
 How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
 'Value life, and preserve life for My sake!'
 Thou didst . . . how shall I say? . . . receive so long 65
 The standing ordinance of God on earth,

What wonder if the novel claim had clashed
 With old requirement, seemed to supersede
 Too much the customary law? But, brave,
 Thou at first prompting of what I call God, 70
 And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
 Accept the obligation laid on thee,
 Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
 As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly,
 Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant 75
 And flower o' the field, all in a common pact
 To worthily defend the trust of trusts,
 Life from the Ever Living —didst resist—
 Anticipate the office that is mine—
 And with his own sword stay the upraised arm, 80
 The endeavour of the wicked, and defend
 Him who,—again in my default,—was there
 For visible providence· one less true than thou
 To touch, I' the past, less practised in the right,
 Approved less far in all docility 85
 To all instruction,—how had such an one
 Made scruple 'Is this motion a decree?'
 It was authentic to the experienced ear
 O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
 And get thy praise,—and be not far to seek 90
 Presently when I follow if I may!

* * * * *

For the main criminal I have no hope
 Except in such a suddenness of fate.
 I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
 I could have scarce conjectured there was earth 95
 Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all
 But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
 Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
 Through her whole length of mountain visible:

There lay the city thick and plain with spires, 100
 And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea
 So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
 And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
 Else I avert my face, nor follow him
 Into that sad obscure sequestered state 105
 Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
 He else made first in vain; which must not be.
 Enough, for I may die this very night
 And how should I dare die, this man let live?

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE

Jocoseria, 1883

NEVER the time and the place
 And the loved one all together!
 This path—how soft to pace!
 This May—what magic weather!
 Where is the loved one's face? 5
 In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
 But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
 Where, outside, rain and wind combine
 With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
 With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek, 10
 With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
 O enemy sly and serpentine,
 Uncoil thee from the waking man!
 Do I hold the Past
 Thus firm and fast 15
 Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
 This path so soft to pace shall lead
 Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
 Or narrow if needs the house must be,

Outside are the storms and strangers: we— 20
 Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
 —I and she!

EPILOGUE

Asolando, 1889

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
 When you set your fancies free,
 Will they pass to where—by death, fools think, imprisoned—
 Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
 —Pity me? 5

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
 What had I on earth to do
 With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
 Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drivel
 —Being—who? 10

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
 triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake. 15

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
 Greet the unseen with a cheer!
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
 'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed,—fight on, fare ever
 There as here!' 20

From A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

Bells and Pomegranates, viii, 1846

You only do right to believe you must get better as you get older. All men do so: they are worst in childhood, improve in manhood, and get ready in old age for another world. Youth, with its beauty and grace, would seem bestowed on us for some such reason as to make us partly endurable till we have time for really becoming so of ourselves, without their aid; when they leave us. The sweetest child we all smile on for his pleasant want of the whole world to break up, or suck in his mouth, seeing no other good in it—would be rudely handled by that world's inhabitants, if he retained those angelic infantine desires when he had grown six feet high, black and bearded. But, little by little, he sees fit to forego claim after claim on the world, puts up with a less and less share of its good as his proper portion; and when the octogenarian asks barely a sup of gruel and a fire of dry sticks, and thanks you as for his full allowance and right in the common good of life,—hoping nobody may murder him,—he who began by asking and expecting the whole of us to bow down in worship to him,—why, I say he is advanced, far onward, very far, nearly out of sight like our friend Chiappino yonder. And now—(ay, good-bye to you! He turns round the north-west gate: going to Lugo again? Good-bye!)—and now give thanks to God, the keys of the Provost's palace to me, and yourselves to profitable meditation at home! I have known *Four-and-twenty* leaders of revolts.

From BROWNING'S LETTERS

To E B.B.

Sunday Morning

(Post-mark, 14 July 1845)

. . . By the way, what a characteristic of an Italian *late* evening is Summer-lightning—it hangs in broad slow sheets, dropping from cloud to cloud, so long in dropping and dying off. The ‘bora’, which you only get at Trieste, brings wonderful lightning—you are in glorious June-weather, fancy, of an evening, under green shock-headed acacias, so thick and green, with the cicadas stunning you above, and all about you men, women, rich and poor, sitting standing and coming and going—and through all the laughter and screaming and singing, the loud clink of the spoons against the glasses, the way of calling for fresh ‘sorbeti’—for all the world is at open-coffee-house at such an hour—when suddenly there is a stop in the sunshine, a blackness drops down, then a great white column of dust drives straight on like a wedge, and you see the acacia heads snap off, now one, then another—and all the people scream ‘la bora, la bora!’ and you are caught up in their whirl and landed in some interior, the man with the guitar on one side of you, and the boy with a cageful of little brown owls for sale, on the other—meanwhile, the thunder claps, claps, with such a persistence, and the rain, for a finale, falls in a mass, as if you had knocked out the whole bottom of a huge tank at once—then there is a second stop—out comes the sun—somebody clinks at his glass, all the world bursts out laughing, and prepares to pour out again,—but *you*, the stranger, *do* make the best of your way out, with no preparation at all; whereupon you infallibly put your foot (and half your leg) into a river, really that, of rainwater—that’s a *Bora*.

To E.B.B.

(Post-mark, 23 October 1845)

.... I love you because I *love* you; I see you 'once a week' because I cannot see you all day long; I think of you all day long, because I most certainly could not think of you once an hour less, if I tried, or went to Pisa, or 'abroad' (in every sense) in order to 'be happy' . . . a kind of adventure which you seem to suppose you have in some way interfered with. Do, for this once, think, and never after, on the impossibility of your ever (you know I must talk your own language, so I shall say—) hindering any scheme of mine, stopping any supposable advancement of mine. Do you really think that before I found you, I was going about the world seeking whom I might devour, that is, be devoured by, in the shape of a wife . . . do you suppose I ever dreamed of marrying?

To E.B.B.

Wednesday

(Post-mark 28 January 1846)

Ever dearest—I will say, as you desire, nothing on that subject—but this strictly for myself: you engaged me to consult my own good in the keeping or breaking our engagement: not *your* good as it even might seem to me; much less seem to another. My only good in this world—that against which all the world goes for nothing—is to spend my life with you, and be yours. You know that when I *claim* anything, it is really yourself in me—you *give* me a right and bid me use it, and I, in fact, am most obeying you when I appear most exacting on my own account—so, in that feeling, I dare claim, once for all, and in all possible cases (except that dreadful one of your becoming worse again . . . in which case I wait till life ends with both of us),

I claim your promise's fulfilment—say, at the summer's end: it cannot be for your good that this state of things should continue. We can go to Italy for a year or two and be as happy as day and night are long. For me, I adore you. This is all unnecessary, I feel as I write but you will think of the main fact as *ordained*, granted by God, will you not, dearest?—so, not to be put in doubt *ever again*—then, we can go quietly thinking of after matters. Till to-morrow, and ever after, God bless my heart's own, own Ba. All my soul follows you, love—encircles you—and I live in being yours.

To E.B.B.

Tuesday

(Post-mark 19 May 1846)

With this day expires the first year since you have been yourself to me—putting aside the anticipations, and prognostications, and even assurances from all reasons short of absolute sight and hearing,—excluding the five or six months of these, there remains a year of this intimacy. You accuse me of talking extravagantly sometimes. I will be quiet here,—is the tone *too* subdued if I say, such a life—made up of such years—I would deliberately take rather than any other imaginable one in which fame and worldly prosperity and the love of the whole human race should combine, excluding 'that of yours—to which I hearken'—only wishing the rest were there for a moment that you might see and know that I did turn from them to you. My dearest, inexpressibly dearest. How can I thank you? I feel sure you *need* not have been so kind to me, so perfectly kind and good,—I should have remained your own, gratefully, entirely your own, through the bare permission to love you, or even without it—seeing that I never dreamed of stipulating at the beginning for 'a return,' and 'reward,'—but I also believe, joyfully, that no course but the course

you have taken would have raised me above my very self, as I feel on looking back. I began by loving you in comparison with all the world,—now, I love you, my Ba, in the face of your past self, as I remember it.

All words are foolish—but I kiss your feet and offer you my heart and soul, dearest, dearest Ba.

To E.B.B.

Thursday

(Post-mark 9 July 1846)

My own darling, my Ba, do you know when I read those letters (as soon as I remembered I had got them—for you hold me long after both doors, up and down stairs, shut) when I looked through them, under a gateway . . . I was pricked at the heart to have thought so, and spoken so, of the poor writer. I will believe that he was good and even great when in communication with you—indeed all men are made, or make themselves, different in their approaches to different men—and the secret of goodness and greatness is in choosing *whom* you will approach, and live with, in memory or imagination, through the crowding obvious people who seem to live with you. That letter about the glory of being a painter ‘if only for the neglect’ is most touching and admirable . . . there is the serene spot attained, the solid siren’s isle amid the sea, and while *there*, he was safe and well . . . but he would put out to sea again, after a breathing time, I suppose? though even a smaller strip of land was enough to maintain Blake, for one instance, in power and glory through the poor, fleeting ‘sixty years’—then comes the rest from cartooning and exhibiting. But there is no standing, one foot on land and one on the waves, now with the high aim in view, now with the low aim,—and all the strange mistaken talk about ‘prestiges,’ ‘Youth and its luck,’ Napoleon and the world’s surprise and

interest. There comes the low aim between the other,—an organ grinds Mr. Jullien's newest dance-tune, and Camoens is vexed that the 'choral singing which brought angels down,' can't also draw street-passengers round.

I take your view of H[aydon]'s freedom, at that time, from the thoughts of what followed.

He was weak—a strong man would have borne what so many bear—what were his griefs, as grief *goes*? Do you remember I told you, when the news of Aliwal and the other battles came to England, of our gardener, and his son, a sergeant in one of the regiments engaged . . . how the father could learn nothing at first, of course . . . how they told him at the Horse Guards he should be duly informed in time, after his betters, whether this son was dead, or wounded. Since then, no news came . . . 'which is *good* news' the father persuaded himself to think . . . so the apprehensions subside, and the hope confirms itself, more and more, while the old fellow digs and mows and rakes away, like a man painting historical pictures . . . only without the love of it. Well, this morning we had his daughter here to say 'the letter' had arrived at last . . . her brother was killed in the first battle, so there's an end of the three months' sickness of heart,—and the poor fellow must bear his loss 'like a man'—or like a woman . . . for I recollect another case, of an old woman whom my mother was in the habit of relieving,—who brought a letter one day which she could hardly understand—it was from her son, a sailor, and went on for a couple of pages about his good health and expectations,—then, in a different handwriting, somebody, 'your son's shipmate' 'took up his pen to inform you that he fell from the mast-head into the sea and was drowned yesterday,—which he therefore thought it right to put in the unfinished letter.' All which the old woman bore somehow,—seeing she lives yet.

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To E.B.B.

Monday Morning
(Post-mark 3 August 1846)

How you have mistaken my words, whatever they may have been, about the 'change' to be expected in my life! I have, most sincerely I tell you, no one habit nor manner to change or persevere in,—if you once accept the general constitution of me as accordant to yours in a sufficient degree,—my incompleteness with your completeness, dearest,—there is no further difficulty. I want to be a Poet—to read books which make wise in their various ways, to see just so much of nature and the ways of men as seems necessary—and having done this already in some degree, I can easily and cheerfully afford to go without any or all of it for the future, if called upon,—and so live on, and 'use up,' my past acquisitions such as they are. I will go to Pisa and learn,—or stay here and learn in another way—putting, as I always have done, my whole pride, if that is the proper name, in the being able to work with the least possible materials. There is my scheme of life *without* you, *before* you existed for me; prosecuted hitherto with every sort of weakness, but always kept in view and believed in. Now then, please to introduce Ba, and say what is the habit she changes? But do not try to say what divinest confirmation she brings to 'whatever is good and holy and true' in this scheme, because even She cannot say that! All the liberty and forbearance . . . most graceful, most characteristic of you, sweet! But why should I play with you, at taking what I mean to give again?—or rather, what it would be a horror to have to keep—why make fantastic stipulations only to have the glory of not abiding by them? If I may speak of my own desires for a moment unconnected with your happiness,—of what I want *for myself*, purely—what I mean by marrying you,—it is, that I may be with

you forever—I cannot have enough of you in any other relation: why then should I pretend to make reservations and say ‘Yes, you shall deprive me of yourself (of your sympathy, of your knowledge, and good wishes, and counsel) on such and such occasions?’ But I feel your entire goodness, dear angel of my life,—ever more I feel it, though all seems felt and recorded.

To E.B.B.

Saturday

(Post-mark 22 August 1846)

Ba, Lord Byron is altogether in my affection again . . . I have read on to the end, and am quite sure of the great qualities which the last ten or fifteen years had partially obscured. Only a little longer life and all would have been gloriously right again. I read this book of Moore’s too long ago. but I always retained my first feeling for Byron in many respects . . . the interest in the places he had visited, in relics of him. I would at any time have gone to Finchley to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves, I am sure—while Heaven knows that I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were condensed into the little China bottle yonder, after the Rosicrucian fashion . . . they seem to ‘have their reward’ and want nobody’s love or faith. Just one of those trenchant opinions which I found fault with Byron for uttering,—as ‘proving nothing’! But telling a weakness to Ba is not telling it to ‘the world,’ as poor authors phrase it!

To E.B.B.

1 p.m. Saturday
(Post-mark 12 September 1846)

You will only expect a few words—what will those be? When the heart is full it may run over, but the real fulness stays within.

You asked me yesterday ‘if I should repent?’ Yes—my own Ba,—I could wish all the past were to do over again, that in it I might somewhat more,—never so little more, conform in the outward homage to the inward feeling. What I have professed . . . (for I have performed nothing) seems to fall short of what my first love required even—and when I think of *this* moment’s love . . . I could repent, as I say.

Words can never tell you, however,—form them, transform them anyway,—how perfectly dear you are to me—perfectly dear to my heart and soul.

I look back, and in every one point, every word and gesture, every letter, every *silence*—you have been entirely perfect to me—I would not change one word, one look.

My hope and aim are to preserve this love, not to fall from it—for which I trust to God who procured it for me, and doubtlessly can preserve it.

Enough now, my dearest, dearest, own Ba! You have given me the highest, completest proof of love that ever one human being gave another. I am all gratitude—and all pride (under the proper feeling which ascribes pride to the right source) all pride that my life has been so crowned by you.

God bless you prays your very own R.

I will write to-morrow of course. Take every care of *my life* which is in that dearest little hand; try and be composed, my beloved.

TO SARIANNA BROWNING

Sunday, June 30, '61

. . . . A. cried '*Quest' anima benedetta è passata!*' It was so. She is with God, who takes from me the life of my life in one sense,—not so, in the truest. My life is fixed and sure now. I shall live out the remainder in her direct influence, endeavouring to complete mine, miserably imperfect now, but so as to take the good she was meant to give me. I go away from Italy at once, having no longer any business there. I have our child about whom I shall exclusively employ myself, doing her part by him. I shall live in the presence of her, in every sense, I hope and believe—so that so far my loss is not *irreparable*—but the future is nothing to me now, except inasmuch as it confirms and realizes the past. I cannot plan now, or at least talk about plans—but I shall leave Italy at once, only staying to take away the necessity of a return, for years at least. Pen has been perfect to me. he sate all yesterday with his arms round me, said things like her to me. I shall try and work hard, educate him, and live worthy of my past fifteen years' happiness. I do not feel paroxysms of grief—but as if the very blessing, she died giving me, insensible to all beside, had begun to work already. She will be buried to-morrow. Several times in writing this I have for a moment referred in my mind to her—'I will ask Ba about that.' The grief of everybody is sincere, I am told. Everybody is kind in offers of help—all is done for me that can be, and it is not a little just now. . . . I shall now go in and sit with herself—my Ba, forever.

To JULIA WEDGWOOD

Nov. 4, 1864

Yes, that was a strange, heavy crown, that wreath of Sonnets, put on me one morning unawares, three years after it had been twined,—all this delay, because I happened early to say something against putting one's loves into verse: then again, I said something else on the other side, one evening at Lucca,—and next morning she said hesitatingly 'Do you know I once wrote some poems about *you*?'—and then—'There they are, if you care to see them,'—and there was the little Book I have here—with the last Sonnet dated two days before our marriage. How I see the gesture, and hear the tones,—and, for the matter of that, see the window at which I was standing, with the tall mimosa in front, and little church-court to the right. Afterward, the publishing them was through me—in the interest of the poet, I chose that they should be added to the other works, not minding the undue glory to me, if the fact should become transparent. there was a trial at covering it a little by leaving out one sonnet which had plainly a connexion with the former works. but it was put in afterwards when people chose to pull down the mask which, in old days, people used to respect at a masquerade. But I never cared. 'The Portuguese'—purposely an ambiguous title—was that Caterina who left Camoens the riband from her hair.

NOTES

PAGE xvii. *Landor*: Walter Savage (1775-1864). The poem was first published in the *Morning Chronicle*, 22 November 1845.

PAGE xvii. *Bagehot* Walter (1826-77), political economist and stimulating, if somewhat erratic, literary critic.

PAGE xx. *Swinburne* Algernon Charles (1837-1909). Robert Browning wrote him (23 Feb. 1875) the following letter of thanks for his masterly criticism—perhaps still the most penetrating that has appeared:

My dear Swinburne,

I feel much embarrassed in what I want to say. Your generosity has been, all along, so conspicuous, that one may doubt whether you any more expect grateful recognition of it than of justice or any other quality that a good man is bound to possess. But I cannot help thinking that you have,—in the case of this criticism upon me in your last performance,—gone beyond the ordinary requirement and quite up to the Christian point of ‘compelling the needy to come in’ and be most generously dealt with. For, with your mastery of matter and manner in literature, you could easily have said whatever was wanted, without reference to me and my poems *that*, you know well enough. I wish you all success, and that the admiration of whomever it be you would acknowledge as competent to bestow admiration, may express itself as cordially, and far more eloquently than that entertained for you, Dear Swinburne, by yours

ever truly

ROBERT BROWNING

Letters of R. Browning (Yale University Press).

PAGE xx. *Lord Brooke*. Fulke Greville (1554-1628), who wrote tragedies, religious and philosophical poems, and a *Life of Sir Philip Sidney*.

PAGE xx. *Lynceus*: one of the Argonauts, whose sight was so keen that he could see through the earth.

PAGE xxi. *Pervial* pervious, hence easily seen through, clear. For ‘pervial’ the *O.E.D.* gives two illustrative quotations, and two for ‘pervially’: all four from Chapman.

PAGE xxii. *Renan*. Ernest (1823-92), French sceptical philosopher and historian. Swinburne refers to ‘A Death in the Desert’ (see p. 156).

PAGE xxii. *Strauss*: David Friedrich (1808-74), German

rationalist theologian. Swinburne refers to 'Christmas Eve' (see p. 51).

PAGE xxii. *Gundo Franceschini*: the murderous husband in *The Ring and the Book*.

PAGE xxii. *Louis Napoleon*: (1808-73). Napoleon III; the poem referred to is *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*, a monologue delivered by the Prince, i.e. Napoleon III, in defence of his life and character.

PAGE xxiii. *Henry James* (1843-1916). In the fifty years since this was written the statement (p. xxiv) that Browning has been treated rarely as quotable has been signally falsified. Next after Shakespeare, Browning is among the most frequently quoted of English poets.

PAGE xxv. *George Saintsbury*: (1848-1937), the critic who had read more widely in English and other literatures than any other critic of his generation. *Qualis ab incepto*, as he was in the beginning.

PAGE xxviii. *Monstr' inform' ingens-horrendous*: from 'Waring' (see p. 21), condensed from Virgil, *Aeneid*, iii 658: 'Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen ademptum': A monster fearful and hideous, vast and eyeless.

PAGE xxviii. *F. L. Lucas*. (1894-). Almost all the poems referred to in Mr Lucas's last paragraph are printed in this volume. Exceptions are the poem about the fickle mistress ('Porphyria's Lover') and 'Evelyn Hope' (the dead girl and the rose-leaf—but it was a geranium leaf).

PAGE 2. *HEAP CASSIA*. Sung by Paracelsus (c. 1490-1541), German physician, the subject of a long dramatic poem by Browning.

1 2. *labdanum*; or *ladanum*, a gum resin which exudes from the Rock Rose (or Gum Cistus). Paracelsus comments that 'the list of drugs smacks of my old vocation' (that of chemist) and the whole poem is easier to enjoy for its sound and its imagery than to analyse.

II. 14-16 *with moth'd . . . young*: arras, mouldering among the lutes and books of a long dead queen who was young when the now moth-eaten and dropping arras was new.

PAGE 3. *OVER THE SEAS*. Sung by Paracelsus.

'The sad rhyme of the men who proudly clung
To their first fault, and withered in their pride.'

PAGE 5. *THUS THE MAYNE*. Paracelsus is dying in a cell in the Hospital of St. Sebastian at Salzburg, and his friend Festus is sitting by his bedside. Paracelsus asks him to 'Speak on . . . only your voice. I shall dream else. Speak on!' and Festus speaks.

PAGE 7. THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING. One of the songs sung by Pippa in *Pippa Passes*. It is true to the character of Pippa, but has foolishly been taken to be Browning's expression of his own view of life. In the poem the phrase 'God's in his heaven' means for Pippa that 'All's right with the world'. For the two persons who overhear the song the phrase has a threatening meaning.

PAGE 7. A KING LIVED LONG AGO. First printed as 'The King' over the signature 'Z' in the *Monthly Repository*, November 1835, five and a half years before *Pippa Passes*, in a slightly shorter text, with slight verbal differences here and there.

PAGE 9. MY LAST DUCHESS. l. 3. *Fra Pandolf*. imaginary, as is *Claus of Innsbruck* (l. 56).

PAGE 11. SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER. l. 39. *Arian* a follower of Arius (4th century A.D.) who held that Christ was created and was thus inferior to God.

l. 49 *great text in Galatians*: perhaps v. 19-21, though St. Paul mentions only seventeen 'works of the flesh'.

l. 56. *Manchee* a follower of Manus (3rd century A.D.) who held that Satan was co-eternal with God.

l. 70. *Hy, Zy, Hine* . . . : the notes of the vesper-bell.

PAGE 14. IN A GONDOLA. l. 22 *The Three* 'a secret tribunal, the *Inquisitori di Stato*. It acquired for itself an ominous reputation in Venetian history. Yet "the Three" was merely a sub-committee of the Ten appointed in 1539, chiefly for the supervision of the foreign affairs of the Republic . . . During the long decline of Venice . . . suspicion of its own ambassadors became one of its haunting terrors, and it was before the Council of Three that suspected persons were brought.' Horatio Brown, *The Venetian Republic* (1902), pp. 111-12.

l. 33. *cruce* must mean crucible, it is a word of Browning's invention, and had been already used by him in *Sordello*, vi. 300.

l. 108. *stylet* stiletto, dagger.

l. 111. *sainis*] *sains* 1842-63 (= 'blesses').

l. 127. *The Gudecca* one of the islands which make up the city of Venice.

l. 141. *the lory*: apparently Browning's shortened form of loriquet, a small parrot.

l. 181. The 'tune' is presumably the sound made by the approaching tide ('lymph').

l. 186. *Schidone* Bartolomeo Schedon, an Italian painter of the sixteenth century.

l. 188. *Haste-thee-Luke* Luca Giordano (1632-1705), a Neapolitan painter nicknamed Luca-fa-Presto, from his father's frequent repetition of the words 'Fa presto' ('work fast').

l 190. *Castelfranco*: Giorgione of Castelfranco (1477-1510).

l 192. *Ser* Master, elder statesman.

l 193. *Tizian*: Tiziano Vecellio (c. 1477-1576), anglicized as 'Titian', but Browning has a pedantic fondness for 'correct' spellings, e.g. Klutaimnestra, Michel Agnolo (see p. 124). Titian is generally said to have died of the plague, not to have been murdered.

PAGE 21. *WARING* The poem is 'a fancy portrait of a very dear friend' Alfred Domett (1811-77), who emigrated to New Zealand in 1852, and became Prime Minister. Browning imagines that Waring, who has suddenly disappeared from London, may be heard of in distant countries, under various disguises.

ll 1, 2. Cf 1 Samuel iv 21.

l 10. *in Vishnu-land*. India. Vishnu is one of the three principal Hindu deities

Avatar descent of a god to the earth in an incarnate form

l 13. *Kremlin* the Tsar's chief palace, now used as the seat of the Russian government.

l 14. *syenite*: a crystalline rock allied to granite

l 24. *maiden*: Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. The 'circle of mute kings' are the Greek chieftains at Aulis, where the fleet, about to sail for Troy, was weatherbound, and the seer Calchas declared that before it could leave, Iphigenia must be sacrificed. Artemis (Diana) took pity on her and carried her off to be her priestess in the land of Tauri (the Crimea: see ll 28 and 33).

l 54. *Caldara Polidore*, Polidoro Caldara Caravaggio (c. 1492-1543), a pupil of Raphael

l 57. *Purcell*. Henry (1658?-1695), still perhaps the most fully inspired English composer.

PAGE 24. *PICTOR IGNOTUS* ('an unknown painter'). The poem is purely imaginary.

l 32. No doubt refers to the Borgo Allegro (Joyous Street) in Florence, so called when Cimabue's Madonna was carried along it in triumph

l 67 *travertine* light-coloured limestone.

PAGE 26. *THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY*. First entitled *England in Italy*.

Piano di Sorrento: plain of Sorrento, in south Italy, south of Naples.

This poem, with its companion piece *The Italian in England*, was written after Browning's visit to Italy in 1844.

Fortù is a little Italian peasant girl, whom Scirocco (l. 5), the oppressively hot wind of the country, has frightened.

l. 35. *quail-nets*: nets slung on to poles by rings to catch quails flying across the Mediterranean.

l. 47. *frails*: baskets.

ll. 53 and 69. *Amalfi* and *Salerno*: small towns on the coast, south of Naples and Sorrento.

l. 87. *love-apple*: tomato.

l. 97. *lasagne*. macaroni.

l. 138. *sorbs*. service-trees.

ll. 138-40. *hairy gold orbs*; ll. 138-40 originally read

Or strip from the sorbs

A treasure, so rosy and wondrous

Of hairy gold orbs.

These 'gold orbs' were then the berries of the service-tree; one doesn't know what they are now!

l. 157. *fume-weed*: fumeworts, or perhaps fumitory.

PAGE 33 THE LOST LEADER. Browning admitted (in 1875) that he had Wordsworth in his mind, 'but simply as a "model" . . . I thought of the great Poet's abandonment of liberalism, at an unlucky juncture, and no repaying consequence that I could ever see'.

PAGE 35. HOME THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD.

PAGE 36. HOME THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA.

In *Bells and Pomegranates*, vii: *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845, a group of three poems appeared as 'Home Thoughts, from Abroad'. They were:

I. 'Oh, to be in England . . .'

II 'Here's to Nelson's memory . . .'

III 'Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent . . .'

In the collected edition of 1849 No II was omitted altogether but restored in 1863 in a different grouping. In 1849 'Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent . . .' became 'Home Thoughts, from the Sea'.

PAGE 36. HOME THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA. l. 5. *Here and here did England help me*: naval victory of *Cape St. Vincent*, 14 Feb 1797; naval engagements in *Cadiz Bay*, under Drake (1587), Essex (1596), Sir George Rooke (1702), Lord St. Vincent (1797-9); at *Trafalgar* (1805); in the capture of *Gibraltar* 24 July 1704.

PAGE 36. ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH. First printed in *Hood's Magazine* (1843) and afterwards enlarged in No. VII of *Bells and Pomegranates*. The tomb and personages are fictitious, but St. Praxed's Church exists at Rome. St. Praxed was a daughter of Pudens mentioned in 2 Timothy iv. 21. (In l. 95 the Bishop must be supposed to be confused in his thoughts, since he speaks of 'Saint Praxed at his sermon'.)

l. 1. Cf Ecclesiastes i. 2.

l. 21. *epistle-side*: the south side of the altar.

l. 26. *tabernacle*: Browning uses this in the obsolete sense of the canopied structure itself, not the modern sense of a canopied niche.

l. 29. *Peach-blossom marble*: Ruskin wrote of Browning in *Modern Painters*, vol. iv (1856): 'He is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages; always vital, right, and profound; so that, in the matter of art . . . there is hardly a principle connected with the mediaeval temper, that he has not struck upon in those seemingly careless and too rugged rhymes of his. There is a curious instance [in 'St. Praxed's']—I mean the kind of admiration with which a southern artist regarded the stone he worked in; and the pride which populace or priest took in the possession of precious mountain substance, worked into the pavements of their cathedrals, and the shafts of their tombs. . . .

'I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry in which there is so much told . . . of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I said of the central Renaissance in thirty pages of the "Stones of Venice", put into as many lines, Browning's being also the antecedent work.'

l. 31. *onion-stone*: cipoline, an Italian marble, white, with pale green shadings. 'Browning does right in translating . . . "cipollino" into "onion-stone". . . . How many travellers hearing the term "cipollino" recognize the intended sense of a stone splitting into concentric coats, like an onion?' (Ruskin, loc. cit.)

l. 41. *olive frail*: a rush basket for packing olives.

l. 49. *Jesu Church*: the Jesuits' church in Rome; on one of the altars there is a sculptured group of the Trinity in which the Father holds a large globe of *lapis lazuli* (l. 48).

l. 51. *swift as a weaver's shuttle*: see Job vii. 6.

l. 53. *antique-black*: *antico nero*, a black marble.

l. 79. *Ulpian*: a Roman writer on law, who lived from about A.D. 170 to A.D. 228, i.e. after the so-called classical age of Latin. See l. 99 below, where 'Elucescebat' ('it was beginning to shine') is quoted from Gandolf's epitaph, and mocked at as late Latin, such as M. Tullius Cicero never used.

l. 89. *mortcloth*: funeral pall

l. 108. *a Term*: a statue, like those of the god Terminus, representing the upper part of the body and ending below in a pillar or pedestal.

l 110. *thyrsus* a wreathed staff, borne by Dionysus and his votaries.

l 111. *entablature* seems to mean (wrongly—Browning often stumbles in his technical terms) the top of the tomb.

PAGE 40. THE LABORATORY. l 29 *Mignon* must mean here a small woman, though this use is not allowed by the dictionaries.

PAGE 44 PARTING AT MORNING. l. 3. *him* the sun.

PAGE 44 SAUL. See I Samuel xvi. 14-23. Browning when he wrote the first part of *Saul* had just been reading Smart's *Song to David*.

PAGE 52. EASTER DAY. l 20. Just so] As when 1850.

PAGE 53. LOVE AMONG THE RUINS. The scenery in Browning's mind is probably Italian, though some of the details (e.g. sts iii, iv, vi) are more suited to Eastern cities (Babylon and Jerusalem have been suggested).

l. 65. *causeys* causeways.

PAGE 56. A LOVERS' QUARREL St. v refers to the marriage of Napoleon III of France on 30 January 1853 to the beautiful Eugénie de Montijo of Spain. Mrs. Browning admired Napoleon, Browning did not.

St. vii. Mrs Browning was an ardent believer in spiritualism which was all the rage in the winter of 1852-3. Browning was a disbeliever.

ll. 90, 91. See Proverbs xviii. 21.

PAGE 62. UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY. l. 39. *diligence*: public stage-coach.

l. 42. *Pulcinella-trumpet*: the trumpet announcing Punch and Judy.

l. 44. *liberal thieves...Archbishop's...Duke*. these and other similar allusions in the remainder of the poem make a picture of an Italian town such as Florence in the first half of the nineteenth century, before Italy was united in 1859, with its (Austrian) Archduke, its Papal Archbishop, and its own custom houses (l 56) and excise duties.

PAGE 67. FRA LIPPO LIPPI (1412-69), Florentine painter.

l. 7. *The Carmine* (a trisyllable) the church in Florence of the Carmelites (see note on l 139) It contains the Brancacci Chapel, celebrated for its mural paintings.

l. 17. *Cosimo*. Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464). The Medici were a family of merchant princes, masters of Florence from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. Cosimo was noted not only for his administrative ability but also for his patronage of literature and art.

l. 73. *Jerome*: St Jerome (c. A.D. 340-420) one of the Fathers

of the Church, noted for his learning and the austerity of his life. He is often painted in the way ll 73-4 suggest.

l. 121. *The Eight*: 'the Eight of War', a new magistracy, created in 1375, when Florence was at war with the Pope.

l. 130. *the anthiphonary*. a book of antiphons (versicles or sentences sung by one choir in response to another).

l. 139. *Carmelites*: one of the four orders of mendicant friars (the others were the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians).

Camaldolese: members of the religious order founded by St. Romuald at Camalodi, near Florence, in 1012

l. 140. *Preaching Friars*. the Dominicans. They use the abbreviation 'O.P.' (*Ordinis Praedicatorum*) after their names

l. 189 *Giotto* (c. 1266-1336), Florentine painter, pupil of Cimabue and friend of Dante.

l. 196. *Herodias*: actually the daughter of Herodias (St. Matthew xiv. 3-11).

l. 235. *Angelico*. Fra Angelico (1387-1455), a Dominican monk, noted for the saintliness of his life and the sweetness and simplicity of his paintings. The cells of the convent of San Marco in Florence are adorned with his frescoes

l. 236 *Lorenzo* (c. 1370-1425), called 'il Monaco' (the monk), was a Camaldolese (see note on l. 139).

l. 276. *Guidi*: Tommaso Guidi (1401-28), called Masaccio ('hulking'), a painter far in advance of his time. Many frescoes in the church of the Carmine (see note on l. 7) are by him.

l. 322. *St. Laurence*. a deacon of Pope Sixtus II. He was sentenced to be burnt alive on a gridiron, c. A.D. 258. In the midst of his torments he said to the judge: 'I am roasted enough this side; turn me round, and eat.'

l. 346. *Sant' Ambrogio* the convent of St. Ambrose in Florence.

l. 354. *St. John*. the Baptist, patron saint of Florence.

l. 377. *Iste perfecit opus*. in 1441 Lippi painted an altar-piece (now in the Accademia of Florence) for the nuns of St. Ambrogio. Its subject is the Coronation of the Virgin, amidst a band of saints and angels. One of the attendant monks is Lippi himself; an angel close by holds a scroll towards him, on which is written *Iste perfecit opus* ('This man accomplished the work').

l. 381. *hot cockles*: a game in which one player lies face downwards or is blindfolded, and being struck on the back by the others in turn, guesses who struck him.

PAGE 79 A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S. A toccata is strictly a composition for a keyboard instrument (such as the clavichord,

l 18) 'intended to exhibit the touch and technique of the performer, and having the air of improvisation in later times loosely applied'. Galuppi was a Venetian composer (1706-85). No special composition is referred to

ll 19-21. The general meaning of these technical musical expressions is clear enough in the context—more is not required by or of the ordinary reader who is not an expert musician

l. 24. *The dominant*, the fifth note of the scale of any key.

PAGE 82. BY THE FIRE-SIDE. An obviously personal poem, Leonor (st. xxi) being Mrs Browning and the fireside that of *Casa Guidi* in Florence. The scene of the poem has been identified with the ruined chapel which stands beside the mountain path to Prato Fiorito, to which the Brownings made an excursion in September 1853. The speaker is an elderly an reliving his youth

l. 101. *Leonor*, from Beethoven's *Fidelio*.

ll. 103-10. The 'path grey heads abhor' (l 105) is the path to death. The poet shrinks neither from retracing the past (l 103) to his first meeting with Leonor, nor from confronting the future (l. 104) because Leonor is with him. Stanza xxii seems to refer both to the actual living of their life by the grey heads and to their tracing of it in recollection. They have been walking with youth (l 107). It has ceased but they have not believed it until they suddenly realize that they *are* old (ll. 107-9). Youth has vanished just when all was perfect. The 'safety' of this perfection (l 110) is unattainable, and they therefore 'abhor' both their recollection of the past and their present 'waste' (the word is from st xxv, where the imagined poet says that for him age is so good that youth seems beside it as much a waste as age generally is to the grey heads). On this interpretation (much of which I owe to my friend Mr. Charles Williams) the 'safe hem' is the part of their life they have lived; the only other interpretation would make the 'safe hem' synonymous with 'the gulf', which is absurd. But Browning has not worked out his metaphor completely, and the lines defy exact analysis

l. 132. Cf. Revelation xxi. 5.

l. 135. Cf. 2 Corinthians v 1.

l. 185. *chrysolite* a precious stone (olivine) which varies colour from pale yellow to dark green.

ll. 216-17. In a letter of 1 January 1843 E. B. B. describes herself to Haydon: 'eyes of various colours as the sun shines,—called blue and black, without being accidentally black and blue—affidavit-ed for grey—sworn at for hazel. . . . Dark hair and complexion . . .'

PAGE 92. A SERENADE AT THE VILLA. The scene is laid in Italy.

- 1. 6. *fly*: firefly.
- 1. 7. *worm*: glowworm
- 1. 9. *term*: 'a portion of time having definite limits' (*O.E.D.*).
- 1. 12. *for proof*: of her pain.
- 1. 32 *step*: first altered from 'steps' in the 1865 Selection.
- 1. 49. *avail*: i.e. continue to utter—a strained use.
- 1. 51. *a longer lease*: a lease not yet expired.

PAGE 95. MY STAR: Browning placed this poem at the beginning of the volumes of Selections from his poems which he published in 1865 and (a different selection) in 1872. His wife, we may suppose, was in his mind when he wrote it.

- 1. 4. *angled spar*: rock crystal, with angles

PAGE 95. INSTANS TYRANNUS. ('threatening tyrant.') The title is from Horace *Odes*, 3. iii.

PAGE 98. CHILDE ROLAND. Browning is said to have written the poem in one day (on 2 January 1852 in Paris), some instances of haste and carelessness are noted below. The title comes from the last speech of Edgar, feigning madness, in *King Lear*, III. iv.

ll. 23-4. *sc.* I rejoiced that some end, even failure, was in sight, cp. st. vii

- 1. 48. *estrays*: stray creature (legal term).
- 1. 80. *colloped neck*: short neck. As the ordinary meaning of *colloped*—with thick folds of fat—is not applicable to the lean ill-fed horse, Browning perhaps had in mind something more like dewlaps, baggy folds of skin; or a neck made tender by beating, from another meaning of 'collop'.

ll. 176-7. In a letter of 20 August 1853 from Bagnoli Lucca Mrs. Browning writes 'Oh, those jagged mountains, rolled together like pre-Adamite beasts and setting their teeth against the sky.'

- 1. 179. *at . . . nonce*: at the very moment
- 1. 203. *slug-horn*: means a slogan or battle-cry; taken by Chatterton, and from him by Browning, to mean some kind of horn.

PAGE 105. RESPECTABILITY. The Brownings were staying in Paris in 1851-2, and Guizot 'received' Montalembert into the Académie Française on 5 February 1852: the poem was probably written at almost that time. It has been suggested that the poem was inspired by George Sand the novelist, who left her husband, Dudevant, for Jules Sandeau in 1831. But the date makes this rather unlikely.

1. 15. *Boulevard*: now Boulevard; but the *O.E.D.* shows the other spelling in England as late as 1871.

l. 21 *The Institute*: the Institut de France, comprising five Academies, of which the Académie Française (founded in 1635) is the best known: taken here as the symbol of all that is respectable.

l. 22 *Guizot*: (1787-1874), French historian and statesman.

Montalembert: (1810-70) French politician and statesman

l. 23 *lampion*. Ital. *lampione*, carriage or street lamp. Also a 'fairy lamp' as used in illuminations

PAGE 106. A LIGHT WOMAN l. 16 *a wren*] the wren 1855

ll. 55-6. All Browning's plays were published between 1837 and 1846; by the time this poem was written he had abandoned his efforts to become a dramatist

PAGE 109. HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY. The scene is Spanish: Valladolid (l. 3) is 150 miles north-west of Madrid.

l. 90. *Corregidor* the chief magistrate of a Spanish town.

l. 115. *the Prado*: public walk

PAGE 112. THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER. l. 62. *ten lines* such as an obituary notice in *The Times*; *each* must refer to a notice of ten lines, not, as it ought grammatically, of one line

PAGE 116. THE PATRIOT. Browning no doubt had in mind the abortive Italian, and especially the Florentine, struggles in 1848-9 to make themselves independent of Austria. No historical incident is recorded.

PAGE 117. 'AND NOW WHAT ARE WE?' Blougram, based on Cardinal Wiseman (1802-65), is talking after dinner to

Gigadibs the literary man

Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design

And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,

While the great bishop rolled him out a mind

Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

(ll. 975-9).

PAGE 119. ANDREA DEL SARTO Andrea (1486-1531) was the son of a Florentine tailor (hence the name 'del Sarto'). He married Lucrezia, a beautiful widow, in 1513, and went in 1517 to the court of Francis I, King of France, where he painted some of his best pictures. Lucrezia, however, obtained leave for him to visit Italy, where he spent the money with which Francis had entrusted him to buy pictures, and so did not dare to return to France. Browning imagines Andrea on the evening when he first thought of the famous picture of himself and his wife which hangs in the Pitti Palace at Florence.

The facts of Andrea's life Browning took from Giorgio Vasari's (1511-71) account of him in his *Lives of the Painters* (1550). Modern research tends to exonerate Andrea from some of Vasari's charges. At any rate, whether biographically ac-

curate or not, Browning's poem is one of his most completely successful monologues

Andrea was called 'the Faultless Painter' because of the technical perfection of his paintings.

1. 15 *Fiesole*. a small village about three miles from Florence

1. 93. *Morello*. Monte Morello, a mountain near Florence.

1. 105: *the Urbinate* Raphael (1483-1520), born at Urbino.

1. 130. *Agnolo*. Michael Angelo (1475-1564).

1. 210. *cue-owls* an owl common on the shores of the Mediterranean, with a clear metallic cry, whence the Italian name *cùu*.

ll 259-65 On 6 November 1842 Elizabeth Barrett (afterwards Mrs Browning) had written to B. R. Haydon '... who knows? There may be grand aerial frescos for archangelic halls, in which thro the great hereafter you may let out your soul.'

1. 263. *Leonard* Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

PAGE 130. DE GUSTIBUS. 1. 35 *the king*: the Bourbon King Ferdinand II (1810-59) of Naples and Sicily (nicknamed 'Bomba') his reputed cruelty and treachery made him almost universally hated. Several attempts were made on his life and the Young Italy society, in 1843, had attempted a general rising, just before Browning visited Naples.

1. 40. *Queen Mary's saying* 'when I am dead and opened, you shall find Calais lying in my heart' (Holinshed's *Chronicle*, iii 160). Calais was captured by Francis, Duke of Guise, in January 1558. Mary died in the November of that year.

PAGE 131. POPULARITY. ll. 16-20. Cf. St. John ii. 9. 10.

1. 29. *Astarte* Ashtaroth, the Syrian Venus

ll 41-2: the 'cedar house' is from Solomon's Song 1. 17, but the blue 'hangings' from Esther 1. 6

ll. 61-5. A good, and notorious, example of Browning at his roughest and most 'telescopic'. The murex is the shell-fish producing the purple dye, variously exploited by the commercial Hobbs, Nobbs, etc.

PAGE 134. TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA. 1. 12. *fennel*: herb with yellow flowers, used for flavouring sauces.

PAGE 136 A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL. The date may be supposed to be in the early part of the fifteenth century, and the grammarian to be typical of the enthusiastically devoted scholars of the Renaissance

1. 86. *Calculus*. Latin for 'stone', a diseased condition of the body, due to the formation of a stone.

1. 88. *Tussis*. Latin for 'cough'.

1. 95 *soul-hydroptic*: metaphor for the thirst-provoking effects of dropsy.

ll. 129-31. *Hoti . . . Oun . . . De*: three Greek particles, meaning 'that', 'therefore', and 'towards'; '*enclitic*': a word which 'throws its accent back on the preceding word' and cannot be separated from it

PAGE 141. ONE WORD MORE. Originally the epilogue to *Men and Women* which contained fifty poems, afterwards distributed among other volumes of Browning's poems.

l. 5 *Rafael made a century of sonnets* these hundred sonnets and the book in which they were written have been regarded as an invention of Browning's, but he found the allusion to them in the notice of Guido Reni written by Baldinucci at the end of the seventeenth century. At the time of Reni's death 'there disappeared . . . the famous book of one hundred sonnets from the hand of Rafael, which Guido had bought in Rome, and this, not without some suspicion, however ill-founded, that they had been stolen by a domestic' (The Italian is given by F. Page, in *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 May 1940)

ll. 22-4. The Madonna di San Sisto is at Dresden: the Madonna di Foligno in the Vatican: the Madonna del Gran Duca in the Pitti Gallery at Florence. the Madonna with Lilies—*La Belle Jardinière*—in the Louvre at Paris. These are among the best known of Raphael's many Madonnas, mostly painted from the same model, probably the young girl known as La Fornarina.

ll. 32-49. The story of Dante comes from his *Vita Nuova*, though Browning seems to have invented the detail that the 'certain people of importance' who interrupted him meant to seize Dante.

l. 57. *Bice* short for Beatrice.

l. 74. *he who smites the rock*: Moses: see Exodus xvii. 6.

l. 101. *Jethro's daughter*: Zipporah (Exodus ii. 21).

l. 128 *for once, as I do*: in a style different from his usual. Browning never used this smoothly running metre (trochaic pentameters) before or afterwards

ll. 136, 138. Names of the heroes of some of the poems in *Men and Women* (for Roland see p. 98 for Andrea see p. 119)

l. 163. *Zoroaster*. the Greek form of Zarathustra, the Persian founder of the Magian religion: probably lived in the sixth century B.C.

l. 164. *Gahleo* (1564-1642): Italian astronomer.

l. 172. See Exodus xxiv. 10.

PAGE 148. IN THE DOORWAY. The first two stanzas of four entitled *In the Doorway*, which themselves form part of a longish poem first printed as *James Lee* in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

PAGE 148. AMONG THE ROCKS. The second stanza is omitted.

PAGE 149 RABBI BEN EZRA. Ben Ezra was a Spanish Jew (1119?-68): Browning had translated his 'Song of Death' in 1854, and used his translation as the nine concluding stanzas of Holy Cross Day (1855).

l. 14. *annulling*: i.e. wasting.

PAGE 156. A DEATH IN THE DESERT. The circumstances and characters surrounding the dying St. John are imaginary. These are the first seventy lines of the poem.

PAGE 158. CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS. See Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Setebos: *Tempest*, i. ii. 373.

'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.'

Psalms l. 21. This motto was first added in the *Selections*, 1872.

l. 7. *pompion-plant* pumpkin

l. 92. And give the manikin three legs for his one, 1864.

And give the manikin three legs for one, 1868, 1872.

And give the mankin three sound legs for one, 1888.

It would seem that after 1864 Browning felt himself tied down to ten syllables.

l. 156. *oncelot* not in the dictionaries. In the *Selections*, 1872, this was corrected to 'ocelot', the 'tiger cat' or 'leopard cat' of Central and South America, greyish with fawn spots, and about 3 feet in length. Later texts go back to 'oncelot'. Perhaps 'ounce' (the snow-leopard) may have been in Browning's mind.

l. 274. *orc* sea-monster.

PAGE 167 CONFESSIONS. l. 17: so altered in 1868 from 'something that near its stopper'

PAGE 169. PROSPICE. First printed from advance sheets of *Dramatis Personae* in the *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1864) and later in the same year in *Dramatis Personae*. Little is left of Browning's mask in this poem, in which he passionately prophesies reunion with his wife, who died in June 1861.

PAGE 170. A FACE. The face was that of Coventry Patmore's first wife, for whose album the poem was written.

l. 3. *Tuscan* the early Italian painters, the so-called Primitives.

l. 14. *Correggio* Antonio Allegri (1494-1535), of Correggio in Modena; Italian painter.

PAGE 171. 'O LYRIC LOVE': the concluding lines of Book I of *The Ring and the Book*. They are of the nature of a dedication of the whole poem to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He invokes her aid in Heaven, telling her that his is 'the same voice' (l. 11) as 'the first summons' (l. 7), and praying that he may never begin his song, which is his debt to God (ll. 13, 14) who enriched

and strengthened his poetry by His gift to him of his wife (l. 14), except by beseeching her for the aid she gave him while on earth (ll. 16-19) and never end his song without thanking her ('blessing back' l. 23) for the aid she has given him from 'heaven' her 'home' (l. 24) when she paces its floor wan with unearthly light.

1. 3. A reminiscence of Wordsworth's line (*Excursion*, iii 85):
Boldest of plants that ever faced the wind.

PAGE 172 FROM THE POPE'S SPEECH *The Ring and the Book*, Book X, ll 1002-93, 2116-33

The Pope Antonio Pignatelli (1615-1700) of Naples, Pope Innocent XII from 1691 to 1700

l 2. *Pompilia* aged 17½, murdered in 1698 by her husband, Count Guido Franceschini, two weeks after she had given birth to a son, on the pretext that she had committed adultery.

- ll 22-3. Cf *Revelation*, II 17

PAGE 177 FROM A SOUL'S TRAGEDY. These are the concluding words of the play, spoken by the wise old Papal Legate Ogniben.

Chrappino (l. 21) is the gifted 'soul' of the title the scene is Faenza, the time the sixteenth century A.D.

LETTERS

PAGE 178 [14 July 1845] '*bora*'. the north wind.

'*sorbetta*' either sherbets or ice-creams

PAGE 181 [9 July 1846]

This letter is concerned with Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846) whose autobiography (1851) has survived his vast historical pictures which he hoped would ensure his immortality. He committed suicide on 22 June 1846, a little more than a fortnight before this letter was written. E B B's letters to him were published in 1939

Blake: R B. means that Blake (1787-1823), though he had even less recognition in his life than Haydon in his, was content and unperturbed

Jullien Louis Antoine (1812-60), French composer of dance music Thomas Hardy writes of 'those wild whirling figures born Of Jullien's grand quadrilles'. ('The Reminiscences of a Dancing Man' in *Time's Laughing-stocks*.)

Camoens: Luis de (1524-80). Portuguese poet, author of the *Lusads*.

Alwal: a village in the Ludhiana district of the Punjab. In the first Sikh war it was held by Ranjur Singh On 28 January 1846 Sir Harry Smith attacked and conquered him there after a desperate struggle.

PAGE 184. [22 August]

Moore: Thomas (1779-1862), published his *Life of Lord Byron* in 1830.

Finchley: then a village $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of London. The connexion of Finchley with Byron has not been traced.

Rosicrucian: The Rosicrucians are 'a supposed society or order reputedly founded by one Christian Rosenkreuz in 1484, but first mentioned in 1614, whose members were said to claim various forms of secret and magic knowledge' (*O.E.D.*). The adjective is used loosely (as by Browning here) as equivalent to 'alchemical'.

PAGE 185 [12 September]

This letter was written an hour or two after R B and E B B. had been secretly married at St. Marylebone Church, and had at once separated, not to meet again until Saturday, 19 September, when they eloped to Paris.

[30 June 1861]

A.: their faithful Italian maid, Annunziata.

Quest . . . *passata* 'this blessed soul has passed away'.

PAGE 186. *Juha Wedgwood* (1833-1913) great-granddaughter of Josiah Wedgwood, the potter, and granddaughter on her mother's side of Sir James Mackintosh' drily described by Mr Richard Curle as 'a kind of nineteenth-century blue-stocking with social leanings'. Between 1863 and 1870 she and Browning corresponded on literary matters, but the friendship then died away.

that wreath of Sonnets E B B.'s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, published in 1850. The 'one sonnet' is 'Future and Past'.

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